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DICK AND HIS COMPANIONS WATCHED. DICK UPRIGHT, THE OTHERS ON
HANDS AND KNEES.

OR, THE Hottest Time On Record.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

STRANGE BEQUEST.—MURDER.

"STOP! For God's sake, *stop!*"
Imperatively, imploringly, rang out the loud cry.

It was a woman's voice, and the horseman drew rein.

At the bottom of a deep canyon, where twilight prevailed at noonday, it was impossible to see more than the outlines of surrounding objects.

"Tell me who you are quickly, for there is not a moment to spare," the voice eagerly urged, and the rider could just discern the outlines of a woman's form near him.

"What is the matter, madam?" he asked.

"Ask no questions; there is no time. If you would render a service in the interests of justice, tell me who you are and hear what I have to say. All I require is your bare word that you are an honest man, and I will trust everything to you, even my life."

"Well, madam, I enjoy that reputation where I am best known, and—"

"Your name, your name?"

"Men call me Gold Belt."

"I never heard of you; I know not who you are, but I will trust you, for I must trust somebody. Here, take this paper, and on your life do not lose it. Hunt for the fortune, but guard well your life while searching, and bestow it where it rightfully belongs. As you deal with the widow and orphans represented, so may God deal with you!"

She had pressed a paper into the lone horseman's hand while speaking, and then immediately moved away from him.

"But, madam, you must tell we more than this; what can I do unless you tell me all about the matter?" the man called after her. "At least, I must know who you are."

"No, no; there is no time, no time!" the woman called out, now some distance off along the canyon in the direction from which the horseman had just come. "Go on to Silver Valley, if that be your destination, and there you will learn all you can desire to know, all it is necessary to know, besides what the paper will tell you. Be on your guard!"

Fainter grew her voice while speaking, proof that she was fast speeding away in the darkness, and with the last words the voice died out in the distance.

"Well, I'll be hanged if this isn't opening strong," muttered the man on horseback. "I wonder who she is, and what it is all about? And this paper—Well, I will take care of it, anyhow."

He put the paper carefully into an inside pocket, and rode on his way at the same leisurely pace as before.

"About as curious a piece of adventure as I have run up against in some time," he further mused. "Silver Valley being my destination, anyhow, it will not be out of my way to look into this matter and see what there is to it. And I am cautioned to be on my guard. It looks as if there is something dark in the background."

Silver Valley, one of the most prosperous camps in all that section of country, was in a state of wildest excitement.

Andrew Stephenson, her most prominent citizen, had just been found murdered in his own house, and there was no trace to the murderer, nor any known motive for the crime.

Late in appearing at breakfast, his son Simon had gone up to his room to awaken him or learn what was the matter, and had found him, partly undressed, lying in a pool of blood on the floor, dead. A knife had done the frightful work, and a window over a piazza was unfastened.

Simon immediately gave the alarm, and the camp, as said, was thrown into a state of the greatest excitement. Andrew Stephenson had been mayor of the thriving young city, and was at the head of the Alpha Mining Company, being one of the largest owners in the Alpha Mine. He had a host of friends, and woe to the man upon whom suspicion might fall!

Simon himself held an office in the min-

ing company, and was second only to his father in the camp. He took upon himself at once the duties of mayor, under the circumstances, with the approval of the majority of the citizens, and immediately offered a large reward for the discovery and arrest of the murderer. Business was at a standstill; everybody was out upon the main street discussing the awful event, and more than a hundred men were eager to earn the reward offered.

Said one Job Jarrat:

"Ther man what killed Andrew Stephenson has got ter swing, an' he might jes' as well come right hyar and give himself up fu'st as last! Thar' won't be no fool business about ther job when this hyar camp gits holt of him, you kin bet!"

"That's what is the matter, Job," agreed Billy Millroy, who, by the way, was paying attention to Job's daughter Ellen, the best looking girl in the camp, as was conceded. "And I would like to be the man to find him, for two reasons—that Mr. Stephenson was a friend of mine, and that this reward wouldn't be bad to take."

"You aire right et wouldn't!" echoed a score of voices.

"And I mean to be the man to take it, if it is in the wood, or something like that," chipped in Solon Shank, one of the camp's "characters." "I mean to play detective, or something like that, and if I can find a clew, or something like that, I will make it hot for him, you can bet your bottom dollar! I'll make him wish he had never been born, and so on like that."

It will be apparent that Mr. Shank had some pet phrases.

"The reward is yours, if you can win it," promised Simon, who overheard the remarks.

"What puzzles me," said Zeb Marvin, an old plainsman who had drifted to the camp, "is who could have had sech a grudge 'gin' Mr. Stephenson. When nothin' was stole, et must 'a' been some personal grudge that led to ther deed. But I never heerd tell that Andrew Stephenson had an enemy durin' my brief sojourn hyar."

"You are right, old man; he had no enemy," declared the son.

"Then who in ther name of wonders killed him, that is what I would like ter know?"

"And that is what we all want ter know," declared the first speaker, Job Jarrat. "You want ter go in, Solon Shank," turning to him, "and show us what you kin do. You will win undyin' fame—or somethin' like that."

It provoked no smile, for the matter was far too serious and too fresh in mind to admit of any levity.

"Is there no one whom you suspect, Mr. Stephenson?" inquired John Cook, who superintended the Alpha.

"Not a soul, John," was the answer.

"And you are sure that nothing was taken out of the room?"

"Ha! that reminds me—something that had entirely slipped my mind in the horror and excitement. Come with me!"

He started for home at once, the Stephenson cottage being a little distance removed from the camp center, and Cook went with him, the others following after them in a body.

"What is it?" Cook asked, as they proceeded.

"A valuable paper he had in his possession yesterday—a paper containing a map to a place where, it is said, tons of pure gold are—is not to be found."

"Whew! there is a motive for the crime, then! Who knew that he had such a paper in his possession? Seems to me

this crime should not be so very hard to bring home to the guilty person now. How is it you did not think of this before?"

"I only learned of it yesterday, and I suppose the frightful discovery of murder knocked all thought of it out of my mind. He had it in the inner pocket of his vest, and if it is not there now I shall take it as proof conclusive that that was what he was killed for."

A few minutes' walk brought them to the house, and Simon Stephenson led the way in immediately.

They went straight to the room where the crime had been done.

Some time had now passed since the discovery, and the body had been taken to another apartment, but in the main the room was the same as it had been when the discovery was first made.

Simon opened the door of a closet where his father had been in the habit of hanging his clothes, and there he found the vest he had worn on the previous day. It was but the work of a moment to take it down from the hook and feel in the inside pocket.

"Gone!" he exclaimed.

"Then you have a clew at last," assumed Cook.

"You are right, you are right; but, what am I going to do with it?"

"I would suggest giving it to the people at large; some one may be able to find the wretch."

"Yes, that is what I will do. Many have followed us here, I see," with a glance out of the window, "and are no doubt hungry to get hold of the slightest bit of information."

They went down and out upon the cottage piazza.

"What have ye found?" called out Job Jarrat, the moment they appeared. "Ef et is anything in the way of a clew, we want it, and want et bad."

"So we do, or something like that," put in Solon Shank. "We are all detectives, or something like that, and we are going into this thing in the interests of simple justice, and all like that. Tell us all that is known to you, and so on like that."

Before Simon Stephenson could speak there was a new arrival upon the scene, one that claimed general attention of the multitude immediately.

CHAPTER II.

GOLD BELT, THE UNKNOWN.

The new-comer was a handsome, fearless-faced man, roughly clad, but of striking presence in spite of that.

He had regular features, keen, magnetic, dark eyes, a graceful mustache and long, richly waving hair that fell in a mass from under his rough slouch hat. He had on a blue shirt, with a silk handkerchief tied at the neck.

With coarse boots, he looked like a cow-puncher, but something about his face gave the lie to that. It was the face of a man born to command, as any one could have told at a glance. The horse he bestrode was a coal black, and as fine a piece of horseflesh as that camp had ever seen.

The really striking thing about the man was the belt he wore, which, if not of purest gold, was very deceiving. It was of broad and high band-and-link pattern, and in it were a pair of evidently trusty revolvers.

Every eye was turned upon him the moment he rode up, and every face had a questioning expression.

"How do, citizens?" the stranger cheerfully greeted. "What is the difficulty here this morning?"

"A murder has been done, or something like that," announced Mr. Shank.

"The mischief you say! Who has been murdered?"

"Andrew Stephenson, mayor of our town."

"The mayor? That is bad, decidedly. But you have got the murderer?"

"No; that is the mischief of it, we haven't," spoke up Simon Stephenson. "Give me your attention, gentlemen."

He held up one hand to enjoin silence, and the crowd, eager to hear what he had to say, were silent immediately, and the stranger gave attention likewise.

"I think I have at last found a motive for the deed," Simon began.

"Hooray!" yelled some one.

"A valuable paper has been taken, something that I did not think of until just a few minutes ago. I looked for it in the place where I last knew it to be, and it is no longer there."

"What was it?" was eagerly demanded. "What was it like?"

"It was a writing that contained also a map, and was said to be the key to the hiding place of a vast treasure."

"Whew!"

The new-comer was interested.

"Tell us about it, and all like that," urged Mr. Shank. "Some of us may be able to find the murderer, or something like that."

"Yes, let us have all the facts you know of," supported Job Jarrat. "Let us know what the paper was, so we will know what we set eyes on it. Silver Valley is bound to have that feller, stranger."

"That is right," responded the newcomer. "If a murder has been done the murderer must be discovered."

Simon Stephenson glanced at him quickly and sharply.

"You speak as one with authority," he remarked.

"It is only a way I have, that is all. You mustn't mind that."

"I was in hopes that you would turn out to be a professional detective, but I suppose there is no such good luck, now that we need one so much."

"All the same, I do not mind taking a hand in the game as an amateur, if no one objects," assured the man on the black horse, modestly. "I hear whispers around me here of a reward offered."

"Yes, sir. I have offered five thousand dollars cash to the man who will discover and arrest my father's slayer."

"Well, if the citizens don't kick, count me in."

"No one will object. All are too eager to see the crime revenged to show any petty jealousies."

"Very well, gentlemen, I will enter with you, and see what I can do. Maybe all of us together can discover something that will lead to the arrest of the guilty person."

"Or something like that," finished off Mr. Shank.

"What is your name?" inquired Simon Stephenson.

"Men call me Gold Belt," was the response.

"And that is your name?"

"Well, that is the cognomen I am wandering around under at present, and I suppose it will fill the bill as long as I answer it. Won't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so, if you prefer not to mention your real handle. But, I was about to tell the people more concerning the missing paper and map. I will do so now, for I want all to hear."

"Yes, yes; let us hear," urged the throng.

"Until yesterday," explained the son, "I had no knowledge that my father

possessed such a paper. He showed it to me, and said that soon we would begin search for the treasure. And he told me something about the history of it, and how it came into his possession."

"Go on, go on," cried the crowd. "Give us the hull of it."

"Very well; I will do so. My father once befriended a man named Bassett, and he gave him this paper in return. He knew its value, but his health was broken and he could not do anything with it himself. He had received it from some one else under similar circumstances. The place where the treasure is supposed to be is over here in Devil's Gateway."

That was the name of a yawning chasm, frightfully deep, just to the west of the camp.

"What is the treasure supposed to consist of?" asked the stranger.

"Tons and tons of virgin gold, if the legend is true," answered Simon. "It is singular that the paper did not come to mind before, but it did not until a little while ago."

"That is strange, certainly, considering that you heard of it for the first time last night; but that is of no moment; what you want now is to discover that paper, and by it the murderer. By the way, is any one missing from your camp to-day?"

"Not so far as we have been able to ascertain."

"And had your father taken any one into his confidence concerning this rich deposit?"

"Not to my knowledge; in fact, I am sure he had not done so. He gave it to me as a secret that must not be let out. But, in the interests of justice, I will not hold it back."

"That is right. If found, it will be yours anyhow, no doubt, according to the terms of the paper, for I suppose it was a conveyance of rights, was it not? You are going about the business in the right way, as far as I am able to see."

"There is one thing I think we had better do," spoke up Job Jarrat.

"What is that?" asked the acting mayor.

"I think we had better make every stranger give a better account of himself than this one has done," was the sullen response.

The new-comer looked at the man, and Jarrat's eyes sought the ground with something of a hangdog expression on his face. It was not pleasant to bring such a turn upon a man like Gold Belt.

"What is the matter with you?" Gold Belt demanded. "You don't imagine that I was here last night and did the deed, do you?"

"I can't prove that you was or wasn't."

"Probably not; but I can prove it. I came here from Hancock, where I left three days ago, and if you will take the trouble to go back over my trail you can probably follow it straight to that camp without a break."

"Three days from thar' here!" exclaimed Jarrat. "Et ain't more'n thirty hours goin', nohow you kin fix et. What have you been doin' with your time? Mr. Stephenson, hyar is a stranger who has given us no good count of himself, an' who ain't got no name, and I fer one am in favor of makin' him prove up."

A dark look came over the face of the stranger, and his eyes flashed.

"You cannot suspect this man, surely, Job," protested Simon.

"That ain't the question," returned Jarrat, doggedly. "Ef et was your father alive, and in your place, he would make every stranger come to the scratch, and you know he would."

"That's what's the matter," yelled others in the crowd, and there was a display of guns. "We want to know more about you, stranger—who ye are, whar' ye are from, and what brought ye hyar," a single voice in the rear of the crowd added.

"That's the tune!" shouted Jarrat, himself drawing a gun and stepping forward. "Come down off'n that hoss, stranger, and satisfy us that you are all right, and no harm done. Refuse, and we shall be obliged to deal with ye the same as ef ye was guilty. The people of Silver Valley have taken hold of the reins hyar. Ef ye are innocent, no harm done, and we'll welcome ye all the harder."

CHAPTER III.

JUDGE LYNCH IN DEMAND.

The new-comer was in a dilemma.

Innocent of all knowledge of the crime, yet he had on his person the very paper, perhaps, for which the deed had been done!

He had a delicate part to play, with the chances all against him. If he showed fight, he would stand no chance whatever, while if he tried to laugh the suspicion away it might be thought only a trick.

There seemed only one chance open for him, and that was to offer himself willingly and trust to their appreciation of his willingness to carry the force of his innocence to their minds and so lead them to forego searching him. There was plenty of risk even in that, but it was the only open door.

"Why, certainly, no harm done," he said, throwing a leg over the saddle horn preparatory to slipping to the ground. "I suppose some one will look after my horse? Just have him put away and cared for, and I will settle the damages. I am ready, now, gentlemen, to oblige you in any way in my power. Strip me to the skin, if you want to."

With a smile upon his lips he dropped to the ground, tossing the bridle to some one who offered to take it and was ready—ready in a double sense, it may be guessed.

"What is the use of pressing such a matter, Job?" demanded Simon Stephenson. "It is plain enough the man is innocent."

"Plain as day," supported Solon Shank, adding, "or something like that."

"Oh, let them convince themselves," said the stranger, cheerfully. "What they hope to make out of it is more than I can imagine, however."

"Give it up, Job," urged Simon.

"Don't ye see the crowd demands et?" asked Jarret. "Ef we make this man come up to the scratch, we will have the best sort of 'scuse for makin' every one else come to time."

"That's what's the matter," a voice supported.

"Ye see how et is," Jarrat called attention.

"Well, proceed," assented the new-comer. "If you are going to search me, or arrest me, or whatever you are going to do, go ahead and get it done with. But there is a question I would like to ask."

"What is et?"

"What do you hope to find on me if you do search me?"

"That remains to be seen," Jarret evaded. "Not likely that we will find anything."

"Then what good is it going to do you to search me?"

"Et will set a sample, same as I said."

"Very well, though perhaps if you knew who I really am you would be willing to accept my bare word in the matter."

It was a desperate moment, and the new-comer knew it for such.

If searched and that paper found on his person, he might be lynched before he could make a successful defense—and, indeed, it did not appear that he would be able to make any defense in such a crowd.

Then, again, to lose that paper would be to lose all chance of carrying out the wishes of the woman who had so mysteriously placed it in his keeping. He believed that she was the one who had done the deed, yet he did not know but that it had been a case of almost justification.

"Who the mischief are ye, then?" demanded Jarrat.

"Yes, tell us your name, and all like that," urged Mr. Shank.

"I don't know that it matters, but I was just thinking you would look at me in a different light if I did," Gold Belt declared. "But, since you desire to establish a precedent with me, drive on with your funeral."

"Job, this is wasting time," reminded Simon Stephenson.

"Not a bit et ain't," the urgent citizen disputed. "I was your father's right-hand man in life, Simon, and I know about what he would do if he wur' alive and here, and it was somebody else had been killed. I kin say that I know him better than you do, maybe, fer you have not been out hyar long."

"Well, well, go ahead, if the stranger is willing."

"Et ain't a question of whether he is or not," averred Mr. Jarrat, with much decision.

"Are you quite sure of that, my friend?" demanded the new-comer, and there came into his eyes a steely glint that suggested the blue of a bayonet.

"I opine that's about right. Eh, fellers?" appealing to the crowd.

A number assented.

"Well, if I objected, it would be in a manner like unto this," and the new-comer, quicker than a flash, held a brace of revolvers in his hands—held them right under the nose of the persistent Mr. Jarrat.

It was a surprise, not only for that gentleman, but for all who saw it, for it was about as quick a drop as they had ever seen.

"Wh—wh—what d'ye mean?" Jarrat gasped.

"I mean that you have carried a good thing too far, that is all," was the grim reply. "You heaped insult upon me by ordering me searched, as you seem to have done, and when you allowed that I had no voice in the matter you rubbed it in, and I object. What are you going to do about it?"

"You see," cried Jarrat, "he backs out when it comes to the scratch. I say search him, fellers."

"Yas, yas, we don't know him; search him!"

"At your peril!" the stranger warned. "You will find that I am not a child, to be trifled with, and to have it flung in my teeth that I am a murderer and maybe a thief— You will find that you have got the wrong pig by the ear!"

"Boys, is et a go?" cried Jarrat.

He could do nothing himself; he was backing away from the threatening guns; but he had a host of sympathizers in the throng, evidently.

Without the least warning, strong hands seized Gold Belt from behind and jerked his arms up in the air, and before he could turn or make any use whatever of his guns, others were upon him.

He was disarmed in a moment.

"What have ye got ter say now?" cried

Job Jarrat, exultingly, coming forward and pressing his own gun under Gold Belt's nose.

"I have to say that I believe you have some object in pressing me as you have done, that is all," was the sullen response. "Go ahead, now, if you are determined."

"You kin jest bet we aire."

"Have it done with."

Simon Stephenson thus protested, but all to no purpose, now.

While three or four rough fellows held fast to Gold Belt, Jarrat proceeded to explore his pockets.

The very first pocket into which he thrust his hand, the inside pocket of the new-comer's coat, contained the paper which Gold Belt had received from the woman in so strange a manner.

"Ha! what have we hyar?" the fellow cried, drawing it forth. And then the instant his eyes took in what it was his face paled and for a moment a look of the most supreme confusion came over him. "Wh—wh— How ther deuce—Say, boys, blamed ef I haven't found et!"

He opened the paper and held it up to view.

"It certainly is the paper my father showed to me last night," assured Simon Stephenson, his own face pale with amazement.

"Then let him say whar' he got et," cried Jarrat, excitedly.

"That I decline to do," declared Gold Belt, coolly.

"You will have ter tell," asserted Jarrat, savagely.

"I cannot tell what I do not know."

"You mean ter say you don't know?"

"I will tell you what I do mean, in few words: I never set foot in this camp before this hour. I had no knowledge of this paper, but the way you have urged this search makes me think that you had some knowledge that it was in my possession, if it was at all; maybe you had it up your sleeve."

"Up my sleeve!" echoed Jarrat, furiously. "Would you, then, say that I am ther murderer? Boyees, it is my opine that we have got ther murderer of Andrew Stephenson right hyar— In fact, ain't this hyar find proof of et? What more d'ye want? Ef ther' ever was a lynchin' in this hyar camp of Silver Valley, seems ter me this is a case that would justify such a course."

There was a roar of approval at that.

"Don't et stand to reason?" urged Jarrat. "Ther murder was done last night, and ther paper stolen. This hyar galoot claims he was not here then. He says he has been three days on ther road from Hancock, an' we know et ain't much more'n two days' travel from hyar. And then when we search him and find ther missin' paper in his pocket, what else kin we think 'n that he is guilty? I don't like ter crowd ther mourners, but if ever ther' was a case fer Judge Lynch, et seems ter me this is jest about—"

"That's ther tune!" yelled the hot-headed ones in the crowd. "Thar's all the proof we want; run him up to a limb, double quick!"

CHAPTER IV.

DAISY DAISY CALLS.

Gold Belt was in a desperate dilemma, that was evident.

A dozen men sprang forward to seize him, besides those who already held him prisoner.

There was a shout in the camp, the burden of which was a call for a rope, and the prisoner was roughly hustled away in the direction of the nearest tree, with no attention paid to his protests.

Some of the crowd was opposed to

such haste, but they were sadly in the minority, and their voices could hardly be heard in the general uproar. It was like the efforts of a few trying to stop the advance of an army.

"This way with him!" yelled Jarrat. "Bring on a rope, somebody! Andrew Stephenson was my friend, and I am going to see that justice is done to ther wretch that murdered him! Right this way with him, and we'll swing him so high that he will never know when he stopped goin' up! Clear ther road, thar! This is ther way that Silver Valley deals with murderers!"

And straight toward a big tree, with inviting branches, he led the way, the mad mob following with many a whoop and imprecation.

Gold Belt's eyes glowed like coals of fire, in rage.

He offered no resistance, but a close observer could have discerned that it was with a purpose he was passive.

He was evidently reserving every ounce of his strength for a supreme effort at the last moment, or was perhaps watching for the least relaxation upon the part of the man who held him.

The latter was the true solution, and the opportunity seemed to come at about the time the lynching party came under the shadow of the big tree. With a leap so sudden that it could be compared only to the spring of a panther, the prisoner tore himself loose from the hands of his captors.

They reached for him, springing after him with almost as much suddenness, but they found him facing them, and the two foremost went down like dead men under two powerful blows from his fists.

Seizing the third, who happened to be Jarrat, Gold Belt grabbed him by the legs and swung him around his head with the strength of a veritable Hercules.

In this manner three or four others were sent spinning.

"Shoot him!" some one sang out.

"Knife him!"

"He's ther man we want!"

"Shoot if you want to, but be sure that you are fine shots, or you may hit the wrong man," cried Gold Belt, righting Jarrat and protecting his own body with his. "This joke has gone about far enough."

"Thar' ain't no joke about et!" one fellow cried out.

"For some of you," retorted Gold Belt.

"And et ain't no joke fer you!" the fellow asserted. "At him, boys! We kin git him in spite of his fight!"

"That's what's ther matter! Go fer him, all together, and we'll swing him a couple o' feet higher'n Gilderoy's kite was ever flewed. Here, with that rope, and we will yank—"

"Back! you cowards!"

Another voice, and another actor upon the scene.

A horse dashed to the front, from the other side of the tree, bearing a woman, with two leveled guns in hand, the reins in her firm grasp also.

She was handsome, dashing, and as her horse came to a stop, with feet set forward, horse and rider made a perfect picture. The girl's—she was little more than a girl—hat was tight upon her head, the brim up-flared.

Clad in male attire, with a short skirt in addition, she was riding astride in genuine masculine style. Her jacket and vest were of rich material; a silk shirt with low collar and handsome tie set off her shapely neck. Her feet were incased in fine boots, which buttoned up the sides like leggings.

The crowd recoiled before her flashing eyes.

"You cowards!" she repeated. "What are you thinking about?"

"Thinking about hanging this villain, or something like that, miss," Solon Shank made answer.

"What has he done?"

"Murder."

"What do you say to the charge, my friend?"

"I say that I am wholly innocent, and these fellows shall yet acknowledge it and lick dust for this hour's work," Gold Belt declared.

He still held fast to Jarrat, who was weak and dizzy, and could hardly stand after the rough handling he had received, having been used after the manner of a club to belay his fellows.

"What proof is there of his guilt?" the girl demanded.

"He has got a paper in his pocket that was taken from the dead man's room," explained Shank, "or something like that."

This seemed to remind Gold Belt of the paper, which Jarrat had put into his pocket, and, feeling for it, Gold Belt found it and restored it to his own, giving Jarrat a shove that sent him headlong into the crowd.

"You don't look much like a murderer, sir," assumed the girl.

"Rest assured that I am not," returned the stranger. "I wish you would demand that my weapons be restored to me."

"Who has got them?"

"This fellow."

He indicated one Jackson Potts, a "citizen" of about Jarrat's stripe, and who was Jarrat's pard.

"Fork them over, you, sir!" the girl ordered, bringing one of her guns to bear upon Mr. Potts.

"Jest one minute!" that worthy parleyed. "Ain't you drivin' jest a leetle too fast, miss? You are takin' this feller's bare word 'gainst ther 'hull crowd of us. Don't you s'pose that we knowed what we was about?"

"No, I am not taking his bare word, sir," the girl responded. "I am taking his face into consideration. That is not the face of a murderer, and I believe if he is given a fair trial you will find him innocent. Come, fork over those guns, or take a pill!"

The girl's keen eyes swept over the crowd, and she commanded them all.

"But you are settin' him free," cried Jarrat, now upon his feet. "What business have you ter do that?"

"A better right than you had to hang him unheard. If you have got proof that will hold him, that is one thing; if you haven't, that is another thing."

"What more proof d'ye want?"

"Where is the paper in question?" asked the girl.

"I have it," said Gold Belt. "I shall hold it against all comers, too."

"Then it is yours?"

"I am holding it in trust."

"Hear him lie!" cried Jarrat. "Whar' did he git et?"

"I shall not gratify your curiosity by telling you that, at present," Gold Belt retorted.

"Good reason why, 'cause ye can't! Gal, you aire takin' ther reins of jestice right out of our hands, and lendin' your help to a vile murderer! Thar' is all ther proof anybody could ask!"

"Not enough proof to satisfy me, though," grimly declared the girl.

"And who ther blazes be you, anyhow?"

"I am called Daisy Daisy, and I'm a dizzy dazzler from Dazzleville! Now, what are you going to do about it? How many in this crowd are in favor of fair play here?"

"I am, for one," spoke up Simon Stephenson, promptly.

"And who are you?"

"Son of the murdered man."

"Then you have a right to a voice in matters, I should say. Where is the mayor of this burg?"

"My father was the mayor."

"Whew!"

"But I am acting pro tem., by common consent," Simon added.

"Good enough, then. I never saw this man before in my life, but I know by his face that he is innocent. I will stake my life on it. Now, what is the sum and substance of the proof of his guilt?"

"The fact that a paper was found on his person that was taken from my father's pocket at the time he was murdered, that is all. If innocent, he must know how the paper came into his possession, and so he ought to be able to aid us in hunting out the murderer."

"Will you allow me to see that paper, sir?" the girl asked, turning to Gold Belt, but still having one eye upon the crowd. And, it being handed to her, open, she looked at it.

The moment she did so a cry escaped her lips and her face grew deathly pale. What was this document to her? That was the question that came to every mind, for, clearly, she recognized it.

CHAPTER V.

SOMEBODY MISSING.

"Great Heavens!" Daisy Daisy the next moment exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Gold Belt. "It is evident that you know something about this paper."

"Yes, I do; it is a paper I have been long in search of. The person who held it had no right to it. What did you intend doing with the document, sir?" she inquired of Gold Belt.

"I was told to take it in trust, find what it calls for, and restore it where it rightfully belongs. And the admonition was that as I dealt with widow and orphans, so might God deal with me. I did not mean to say this much, but you appear to have interest."

"Yes, vital interest," the girl declared. "We will take up the work together, if you are willing, and I will be your right bower in the game. Mosey up with those guns, you fellow!" to Jackson Potts, "and give them back to their owner. I am certain now that you have got the wrong pig by the ear, so to say. We will help you in hunting down the real murderer."

Her gun came up and looked Mr. Potts squarely in the eye, and with a creepy sensation, he stepped up and delivered the weapons to Gold Belt.

"That's the ticket," exclaimed the girl. "Now, citizens, what is it going to be, peace or war?"

"Let us have peace, or something like that," spoke up Solon Shank. "I am a man of peace myself, or something like that, and hence a lover of law and order, and so on like that."

"Yes, peace let it be," urged Simon Stephenson. "I was not in favor of this lynching without a trial, but there were only a few of us against the crowd. They all meant well, I am sure, and thought they had the right man, no doubt, but that is not my style."

"Let me assure you, one and all, that you had the wrong man," spoke up Gold Belt. "I am innocent of that crime, and I will take it upon myself to hunt down the murderer to convince you of the fact. Later on I will make known my identity to you one and all, when perhaps you will be willing to admit that you have made a slight mistake."

"Aire we goin' to let him go like that?" demanded Jarrat.

"Don't see no help for et," growled Potts.

"He ain't got no business ter go free, Mr. Stephenson; you'd orter know that. He is s'pected, and the right place fer him is in jail, since ye 'bjet to his bein' hanged."

"That's ther talk," echoed Potts.

"You appear to take a keener interest than the son of the murdered man himself, you two fellers," spoke Daisy Daisy.

"And you seem ter be a pard of this feller's."

"Never saw him before in my life, as you heard me say."

"Then you cottoned to him mighty quick, that is al."

"I always make it a point to chip in on the weak side, and he was the weak side here, fifty to one."

"Well, you will find that you are on ther wrong side before this thing is settled, I'm thinkin'. I am goin' to see this thing out, and if thar' is proof that he is guilty, he has got ter die!"

"Bet yer life on't!" echoed Potts.

"And then, thar' is that paper," reminded Jarret. "What aire you goin' to do about that, Simon Stephenson? You know it is the paper that was stole from your father, and when ye aire sure of a thing, why don't ye act 'pon et? Why don't ye take ther dockymen?"

"I will take care of it, for the present," averred Gold Belt, taking it back from the girl sport.

"Ther doose ye will!" called out Jack. "Simon Stephenson, aire you goin' to 'low et?"

If the young man had a thought of objecting he did not see clearly how he was going to help the matter.

"See here," demanded Gold Belt, "can you prove that this is the paper that was taken from the murdered man's possession? If so, I want to know what the proof is. It will be useful to me."

Jarrat opened his mouth to reply, but held the words back and looked at Stephenson.

"I can swear that it is the same paper my father showed to me last night," declared the latter.

"That's enough," cried Jarrat. "We don't want to hear no more'n that!"

"Not quite enough," demurred Gold Belt. "Here is another claimant for the paper, now. I shall finally turn it over to the person to whom it rightfully belongs. In the mean time it will remain in my possession."

With that, he replaced the paper in his pocket.

"Blame me ef you ain't got the gall of an ox!" Jarrat exclaimed. "Will you tell us who et was guy' that paper to you, ef, as you say, ye didn't steal it ye'rself?"

"No, sir, I will not; at any rate, not at present."

"I wish I was mayor of this hyar camp fer jest one minnit; I would see what you would do and what you wouldn't do," the man vociferated, in rage. "Ef you have come hyar thinkin' that you kin run this town, you will find you can't do et."

"I have no desire to run it, sir. Are you going to the hotel, Miss Daisy?"

"You bet!"

"Then we will go together, if you have no objections, for I want to talk with you. I am under great obligation to you."

"Don't mention that, sir. If you want to talk about anything else, however, come along with you!"

She rode off in the direction of the principal hotel of the camp, and Gold Belt followed her, keeping a sharp lookout for squalls on the way.

"Now, what do you think o' that?" demanded Job Jarrat, as soon as they had gone.

"I think she is a mighty fine gal, or something like that," responded Mr. Shank, looking after the girl sport.

"Be hanged to the gal—and all like that!" roared Jarrat. "You falling in love again, you old fool? I am talkin' about this hyar murder case!"

"Oh!"

"It is a mighty queer case," assumed Jackson Potts.

"The saddest and most mysterious affair that ever came under my notice," acknowledged Simon Stephenson.

"And if that feller ain't the murderer you kin take my head fer a football, and I won't kick," avowed Jarrat. "I'll bet they aire in cahoots, and workin' the racket together."

"Et looks like et," agreed Potts.

"Don't you tell me that lady is a murderer," cried Solon Shank, "or anything like that. She has got the face of an angel, and all like that, and I'll stand up for her to the last, or something like that!"

"In love again, or something like that," laughed Zeb Marvin.

Solon Shank was a man with a weakness and that weakness was an inclination to fall in love with every woman who came to Silver Valley.

He had proposed marriage to at least twenty different ones within the recollection of those who knew him there, at the camp, but had been respectfully declined each time.

"That is all right," he now said. "I attend to my own business, or something like that, and you do the same, or something like that."

He marched off in the direction of the hotel with an air of stiffness.

Billy Millroy now stepped up to Jarrat.

"Can I have a word with you?" he asked.

"What is et, Billy?"

They turned and walked away a few paces together.

"Where is Ellen?"

"Ellen? What about her? She is at home, I s'pose."

"No, she isn't; I have been there, and she ain't to be found."

"That's queer. She must be gossipin' with a neighbor, then."

"No, she ain't; nobody has seen her. Don't you know where she is, Job?"

"Thunder, no! Wouldn't I tell ye, ef I did, boy? Ef she is gone et is a mystery to me—Great blazes! kin et be possible? Ef she has done that I'll cut her heart out, I swear to goodness I will!"

A sudden thought had evidently struck him. He stood with fists clinched, his eyes dilated, and a terrible look was upon his face. The younger man looked at him in half alarm. Whatever the thought was, it was something that took a decided hold upon him.

CHAPTER VI.

DAISY BASSATT'S STORY.

"What are you talkin' about, Job Jarrat?" Billy Millroy demanded.

"Don't I make et plain enough?" was the snarl. "I say ef she has done a thing like that I'll kill her."

"Not while I am around you won't, even if you are her daddy," was the grim declaration. "Ellen Jarrat is my promised wife, and I don't know but I have as good a claim to her as you have."

"Claim be blowed! What if she has sloped off with another galoot?"

Billy paled on hearing that.

"You don't mean it?" he gasped.

"Why not? Don't you remember that half-breed cowboy that has been trying to win her—"

"Bah! she wouldn't notice him, and you know it."

"I know nothing of ther kind."

"Well, then, I do. She hates him!"

"Then suppose he has come here and toted her off?"

"He couldn't do it, for she would 'a' put a bullet into him if he had tried that on. That wasn't what struck you first, and I know it."

"How do you know it?"

"If it had been, you would 'a' threatened him and not the gal."

"Would I? Wouldn't I kill a gal that would go off with sech a skunk as that half-breed, don't ye think?"

"Confound it, Job Jarrat, didn't we jest agree that she wouldn't go off with him willin'ly, and if she has gone at all he has carried her off? What's the matter with you?"

"There's nothin' the matter with me. I don't know where she is, and that is all there is about it."

"Then I would like to know what you was talkin' about."

"Go to blazes and find out, then."

With that, Job Jarrat turned on his heel and went back and joined the crowd, and Billy Millroy stared after him.

"There is something back of this, that I'm sure," the young man said to himself, with a shake of the head. "What it is I can't figger out, but it is somethin' that is cuttin' him hard."

He moved off in the direction of the hotel, pondering the matter in mind, trying to understand it.

"He wasn't thinking of anybody but Ellen, when he first ripped out that way, that I'm sure of," he continued, musing. "And Ellen is gone, and not a word left behind for me. She wouldn't do that if there wasn't somethin' terrible back of it all, and I must know what it is."

In the mean time Gold Belt and the girl sport had reached the hotel, and the girl had given her horse into the keeping of one of the servants.

Together they entered the office, and there registered.

Having done that, they went into the sitting-room of the establishment, and there sat down for a chat.

"Now, sir, I would like to know more about you," the young woman briskly opened the conversation. "You were in a pretty tight fix when I came to town."

"And they would probably have fixed me for a tighter fix still if it hadn't been for you," Gold Belt declared. "I must thank you again for that, and then I want to know more about you, too."

The girl laughed.

"Well, we'll play give and take, then," she said; "you give information and I'll take it. What's your name?"

"Gold Belt—"

"No, no; that won't do, now. That was all right with the crowd, but I am after your real name."

"What is yours?"

"Daisy Bassatt—that is straight."

"Very well, I take your word for it. My name is Richard M. Bristol, but I do not want it known here."

"And Richard M. Bristol is—"

"Deadwood Dick, Jr."

"Ha! I was sure I knew you, but I could not tell where I had seen you before. Now it all comes back to me."

"You have got the best of me now," said Dick, "and I am usually good at remembering faces, too. Tell me where you have seen me before, and freshen up my memory."

"I never saw you before, sir."

"Then how could you recognize me?"

"I saw your likeness in a Denver newspaper some time ago."

"Ah! yes, that is likely enough, for one

of the newspapers did get hold of me not a great while ago. I wonder how many more here saw the same cut and will remember it?"

"Oh, not any, perhaps; this is a good ways from Denver."

"Well, we are introduced, anyhow. Just keep it to yourself, if you will. You declared your willingness to become my right bower in this game, and so I thought it better to trust you to the full limit."

"And I will be your right bower all the righter, if such a word will go," said the girl. "In fact, you can be of the biggest help to me, if you only will."

"In what way?"

"In regard to the paper that has come into your hands."

"And it is just that that I wanted to question you about," said Dick. "I take it you are the child of the Richard Bassatt mentioned in that paper."

"You strike it right."

"Then this hidden mine, or deposit, belonged to your father?"

"Yes."

"And how came it into the hands of this man Stephenson?"

"I do not know."

"Your father is dead?"

"I suppose he is; we have not heard from him in years and years. I was only a little girl when he went away."

"And what are you doing now? You are not looking for him?"

"I have been doing nothing else for the past five years, sir. I have visited every camp of any importance, and hundreds of little ones, in nearly all the far Western States."

"You are nervy, anyhow."

"I fear I have lost all the womanly quality I ever had, Deadwood Dick. I have faced more roughs and toughs than you could shake a stick at, and have had to fight for my life a score of times. It has taken the polish all off, and I am something of a ruffian myself, I fear."

"You are a rather charming ruffian, then, Miss Bassatt."

"Thank you."

"But, about this paper, what do you know about it?"

"My mother has a duplicate of it—no, she had, but it was burned when we lost our house. My father sent it home to her, so that she could use it in case anything happened to him. He said in his last letter that he was going to hunt for the lost gold cache, and that was the last that was ever heard of him."

"And your mother has been waiting all these years?"

"Yes."

"Did she not think him dead?"

"We suppose he is, but still there is something to make us think he isn't, either."

"What is that?"

"Mother has received a certain sum of money regularly every month from a bank in San Francisco."

"That is peculiar, certainly. Could you learn nothing at the bank?"

"Nothing at all. They tell me that a big deposit was made there, to be paid out regularly every month, so much at a time, and it has been paid with the regularity of machine work."

"There is something strange here, Miss Bassatt—"

"Oh, leave off the trimmings, please; I cannot stand the agony, after knocking around as I have been doing. Call me Daisy Daisy, which is about the only name I know now."

"Well, if you prefer it. I was going to say, I will take the matter up for you, if you desire, and see what I can make out of it. If you have been trying for five

years without success, you must be getting tired of the game. But you have at last struck the trail, it seems."

"Yes, thanks to you, and now I will be your right bower while you play the hand. I am good for one trick, anyhow!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT BILLY MILLROY ASKED.

At that moment the door opened.

Into the room came Mr. Solon Shank, bearing a huge bouquet and bowing low as he entered.

"Your pardon, fair lady, or something like that," he said; "I did not know you had company, or anything like that. I have come to present this simple token, or something like that."

"Really, sir, this is an honor," said Daisy Daisy, smiling—indeed, almost laughing. "May I ask who you are, sir, and why you do me this favor?"

She accepted the gift, not knowing what else to do.

"I am Mr. Solon Shank, or something like that," he said, laying his hand on his heart and bowing low once more. "These flowers are a simple token of your welcome to Silver Valley, or something like that. May your sojourn be a long one and the happiest of your life, and all like that."

"Thank you, sir; thank you, thank you!"

"I am the one under obligation, and all like that," said the rather aged and gone-to-seed beau. "The fact that you accept my gift, or something like that, is an honor never to be forgotten, and all like that. Your pardon again for my intrusion, and so on like that," with a bow to Deadwood Dick, and he backed out of the room, and was gone.

"Did you ever?" exclaimed Daisy Daisy, holding her hand over her mouth to keep from exploding.

"Hardly ever, that's the truth," declared Dick, smiling liberally.

"What can be the matter with the fellow?"

"I think he is stuck."

"On me? Ha, ha, ha! He will have to unglue himself again, then, that is certain."

"Or something like that, eh?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, or something like that. But to business again. What is your plan of action in this matter?"

"That can hardly be determined, Daisy Daisy. Circumstances will no doubt have a good deal to do with it, and that fellow Jarrat may have a good deal to do with the circumstances."

"And we will have something to do with him, if he pushes against us too hard, and don't you forget it! He will find that he has run up against a combination that works with a double duplex motion, I am thinking, before he gets done with us. I am no slouch in a scrimmage."

"I don't ask any further proof of it than what I have seen," declared Dick. "I think we will make a good team."

"And pull well together, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, if that is all for the present, I will hie away to my room and slick up a little, for I feel done up after a long ride."

"Certainly; pardon me for detaining you. I'll see you at dinner, no doubt, and after dinner we can further debate the situation, if we find it needs further debating."

"All right; be on your guard against that fellow."

They parted, and Dick returned to the office and bar-room, which was practically one and the same place.

As he entered the room a young man stepped up to him, a fellow he had noticed before in the crowd that had attempted his lynching, but who had hung back from taking active part.

"Kin I have a talk with you?" he asked.

"I guess so," said Dick. "I don't know of any reason why not."

They walked to the back part of the room, where they sat down in a corner out of the way.

"Now, then, talk," Dick invited.

"Your name is Gold Belt?"

"Yes, here."

"That's all right; I ain't fishin' fer any more. I only want somethin' to call ye by, that is all. I don't believe you killed Mr. Stephenson!"

"In which belief you are perfectly safe, sir," Dick declared.

"But I believe you know who did."

"There you are wrong."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I think you are."

"There is one thing I would like ye to tell me."

"What is that?"

"You will think I am askin' for the crowd, mebby, but that ain't so; I am on my own hook."

"Maybe you are playing detective, with the hope of winning the reward that has been offered, and want to get points out of me. If so, I will tell you that I am on that trail myself."

"No, ye mistake me, pardner. Not that the reward would be bad to take at all, and not that I would throw et over my shoulder ef et came my way, but that ain't what I am after now. There is somethin' else that I'm a good deal more interested in 'n that."

"Well, spit it out, then."

"Will you tell me how that paper kem into your possession?"

"It was given to me, I will say that much, at least. What interest has the paper for you?"

"I don't care nothin' about the paper; I want to know who giv' et to ye. If it was a man, then I am done; but ef et was a woman— That is the point I want to settle."

"See here, let me do some questioning in turn, will you?"

"Yes, fire ahead."

"What if it was a woman?"

"Then I would want to know who that woman was."

"And suppose I could not tell you?"

"You could do that, sartain."

"Not if I had not seen her, could I?"

"How could she give you the paper and you not see her?"

"If it was a she, she might have met me at the bottom of the deep canyon that leads here—"

"Did she? Did she meet ye thar', pardner?"

"Did who meet me there?"

"Ellen Jarrat."

"Ah, ha! Who is Ellen Jarrat?"

"I have let the cat out, so I might as well tell the whole business."

"Yes, I think you had, for we can come to an understanding all the quicker," said Gold Belt.

"Well, Ellen is Job Jarrat's darter, and she is my promised wife, that's who she is, but she is missin' from home this mornin' and Job don't know where she is, or says he don't."

"Do you doubt his word?"

"Well, no; I think he tells the truth."

"Was there another lover in the case besides yourself?"

"No one that she would notice. She was mine, lackin' only the parson's job."

"If you had a rival, maybe he has carried her off."

"It couldn't have been done."

"Why?"

"Ellen was tall on the shoot, and she would have plugged him before he could a' said a word."

"Who is the fellow in question?"

Dick was keen, and he knew there was a somebody in the background, whoever it might be. He was drawing information instead of giving it just now.

"His name is Pete White, but he called Half-breed Pete. No use thi of him, though, fer he ain't been here in some time, and he has had nothin' to do with it."

"What is your own opinion, then?"

"I haven't got any; I am all at sea. I was wonderin' if by any sort of chance Ellen could a' been the one that put that paper into your hands."

"Ha! Then you think she may have killed Stephenson?"

"My God! no! But she may know who did."

"You may be right, but I have no way of proving that, unless you can suggest the way. It was a woman who gave the paper into my keeping, and it may have been Ellen Jarrat."

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW THOUGHT SHOWN UP.

Billy Millroy was almost nervous with excitement.

He was a sturdy young man, some twenty-five years old, perhaps, with an open, honest face.

Smooth shaved, he was not bad looking, but inclined the other way, and his dark, curly hair, of some length, adorned a head that was shapely and well poised upon a strong neck.

"I must know all you kin tell me about this, Gold Belt," he eagerly urged, leaning forward in his chair. "Where did you meet the woman? Which way was she goin'? What time was et? Tell me everything you kin, for she was my promised wife, and I have a right to know."

"If it was Ellen Jarrat."

"Yes, yes, ef it was; I can't be sure of that onless you kin describe her."

"And that is impossible, since I met her in the darkest part of the canyon. She stopped me as I came along, and was greatly excited when she spoke to me."

"What did she say to ye?"

"Before I tell you that, I must ask you to pledge yourself."

"To what?"

"That you will not repeat it to others. I will tell it myself when the time comes. If you are inclined to be fair, I will aid you all I can toward finding the lost young lady."

"I'll do anything you say, Gold Belt. I have seen you on your muscle, and I know if thar' is ary man alive kin help me, you are the man."

"We'll make a try for it, anyhow. But, you see the danger, I suppose?"

"What danger? I care nothin' fer danger!"

"I mean to the lady. If brought back here, and it can be shown that she ran away with this paper in her possession, it might go hard with her, unless we are prepared to prove her innocent."

"My God! Who could believe her guilty? She is next to an angel, is Ellen Jarrat!"

"She isn't like her dad, then."

"Not a bit."

"And what are you going to do?"

"That is the p'int. I want you to answer my questions, and then Zeb Marvin and me will set out to find her, takin' the trail from whar' she met you. Zeb kin do et, ef any man alive kin do et."

Dick gave the information desired in detail.

"You have done me a big service, Gold Belt," said ~~Millroy~~ rising. "If I kin return et let me know."

"I'll do that, of course. I may need a friend or two to fall back on, before I get out of this place. What kind of fel'-ew is your friend Marvin to tie to? Is 'all wool?"

"You kin bet! I'll speak a word fer ye lov'in, and you kin count on him if you abq' any backin'."

"All right. We'll come out on top yet."

"I hope so."

Billy Millroy took leave with that, and Dick strolled out upon the main street.

Looks of surprise greeted him from every direction. After his recent narrow escape it was naturally thought that he would remain within the security and seclusion of the hotel.

But then they did not know their man. He walked along leisurely, in the coolest manner, meeting every glance fearlessly, and if there was anybody who felt an inclination to arrest him, that body very wisely did not undertake to do the job, and probably had no desire so to do.

The exhibition Dick had given of his prowess was enough to satisfy any one.

He went in the direction of the Stephenson cottage.

By this time the crowd had dispersed, save knots of men and a few women here and there. The saloons had swallowed most of them for the time being, where the situation was being deeply discussed.

No one was to be seen near the cottage, and having seen nothing of Simon Stephenson for some time, Dick thought maybe he was at home, so he went up the steps to the porch and tapped lightly at the door. It was soon opened, and inquiry proved the correctness of his guess.

Simon Stephenson greeted him, and led the way to a sitting-room.

"I am glad you dropped in," he said.

"I felt it my duty to come," said Dick. "I have been forcibly thrown into this matter, though innocent of any part in it. I want to talk with you concerning the paper I hold."

"Just what I would like to speak to you about. There is one thing that I cannot explain to my satisfaction, and that is, how it came into your hands, you being innocent of the crime or any knowledge of it. You must have had some dealing somehow with the person who killed my father."

"Such is not the case. It is my opinion, however, that the paper came to me through the hands of a second or third party."

"And who was that party?"

"At present I cannot reveal that."

"Why not?"

"Nor can I tell you that."

"There is a good deal of mystery about you, Mr. Gold Belt. The more I have thought of it, the more I am inclined to think that you should have been held to bear trial."

"Then you think I am guilty?"

"No; but through you the guilty one must be reached."

"And through me shall be reached," Dick promised. "I am in the fight to stay."

"Then you are going to undertake to clear it up?"

"I am."

"For the sake of the reward, I suppose—"

"I would undertake it even if there were no reward attached. When my neck is run into danger by some fellow unknown, that fellow has got to come forth and take his medicine, you bet!"

"Well, you appear earnest, and I cannot believe you guilty. But, who did kill my father?"

"Who knew that he had this paper?"

"I do not know that any one knew it besides myself. It was something he wanted to keep very quiet."

"One thing more. Have you ever heard your father mention such a name as Richard Bassatt? Think well before you reply, for there can be no doubt but that he knew something about the man."

"Who is Richard Bassatt?"

"That is not the question. What did your father know about him?"

"I do not know. I never heard the name before in my life till I read it in that document last night."

"He explained nothing about it, then?"

"He said he had received the document from him, in return for a favor he had done him—that is, my father from Bassatt. Further than that, I know nothing whatever."

"Your mother is living?"

"No, sir."

"You are the only left?"

"Yes."

"Then that door of information is closed, it seems."

"Yes. And now, let me ask a question or two of you. Who is this strange girl who came here a while ago and showed such nerve in your behalf?"

"She calls herself Daisy Daisy."

"Pshaw! I know that. I want to know what more you know about her. She has laid some claim to this paper, it appears, and you said you would hold it and deliver it to the one justly entitled to receive it."

"That is straight; that is my intention. Now, how are you disposed to act in regard to it. Suppose circumstances prove that the young woman is the rightful claimant, will you be willing to give up claim to it and surrender? That is one of the important points in the matter."

"Yes, I am willing to do that, if, as you say, it can be shown; but I am determined that the murderer of my father shall be punished as he deserves, and there can be little doubt but that the person who took the paper out of his pocket last night is the one who killed him, and who would take the paper but a person who had interest in it? And if this girl has interest, has she proof that she did not do the deed?"

There was a new thought, certainly.

CHAPTER IX.

WAS ELLEN THE GUILTY ONE?

For one moment Deadwood Dick—or Gold Belt, as he was known to Simon Stephenson—was silent, thoughtful.

"I am not going to take it that you would throw an insinuation at me, sir," he said. "You were thinking of the young lady only when you spoke. The paper, you see, came here in my possession."

"Ha! you are right. No, I did not think of that, and consequently did not mean it. That would be to say that you and she had come here together, or, at any rate, had an understanding with each other, and would together try to free one another from any suspicion."

"So it might look. The fact of the matter is, I never saw her in my life till she appeared on the scene where I was likely to be lynched."

"I take your word for it, sir."

"That, then, turns it back upon her alone. Now, supposing her guilty, why would she let the paper go out of her hands, by a third party, and come into my hands, she knowing nothing about me?"

"I fail to see, unless it was a scheme to take the case off her own hands and put it somewhere else."

"Now you are coming at it. But, how could she work her scheme?"

"How did you get the paper? That may explain."

"I do not care to reveal that yet."

"Then you are holding back an important item, I should say."

"Yes, but with a good reason, and with the right motive, I assure you. I am seeking to find if any one is absent from your town who was here yesterday."

"And with what success?"

"I have found there is a person missing, and no one seems to know where she has gone to."

"She? It is a woman, then?"

"Yes."

Dick was feeling his way along carefully, and wanted to get something out of this man, if he had any knowledge to impart, concerning Ellen Jarrat.

"Who is she?" was eagerly asked.

"Her name, I believe, is Ellen Jarrat—"

"The mischief! Can it be possible?" and the young man was on his feet in an instant, excited.

Dick knew he had touched the quick, in some direction.

"Can what be possible?" he inquired, calmly.

"That she is the one who killed my father."

"Was there any motive?"

"I cannot say; it is possible that there was. She threatened him once, not many weeks ago."

"Ah! if that is the case, maybe we are coming at it. Tell me what you can of that, and let me see if any suspicion points her way. It is possible that you are on the right track."

"You speak like a detective might."

"That is what I am, at present, is it not? I am playing that role, in the way of an amateur."

"Well, I do not know what the trouble was, but I came upon them in time to hear her threaten his life. She was as angry as a wildeat, and flounced away on seeing me."

"And you never learned what it was about?"

"No."

"Had you any suspicion what it was?"

"I took it for granted that he had offered her some insult; I gave it no further thought."

"But now you think that maybe she was the one who killed him. Do you think a thing like that would lead her to do so desperate a deed in so cold-blooded a manner?"

"I am not prepared to say. If it could be shown that she had taken the document that you have now in your possession, then it would look bad for her, if she has really disappeared, as you say. By the way, was it man or woman who put it into your hands?"

"I will answer that: It was a woman."

"Ha!"

"You think, now, that it was she, and that she killed your father?"

"I cannot say. You do not know that it was Ellen Jarrat who gave you the paper, do you? You cannot swear that it was?"

"No, I cannot."

"And can you swear that it was not this other who calls herself Daisy Daisy?"

"I could not swear to it positively, of course, but I will say that the voice was nothing like hers. I would know that voice if I heard it again, I am sure of that."

"And what do you sum it up?"

"I figure it down to just this: If it was Ellen Jarrat who handed me the paper, she knows who killed your father."

"Then she must be discovered—"

"And she will be, but you must have no

land in it. Let it be as if you had not heard about it. Let her lover attend to hat, and he will find her all in goodime."

"But, if he thinks she is guilty, he will bid her to escape. We must make sure of her—"

"She will be made sure of, and I have a reason for asking you to keep this matter secret, and taking no part in it. Will you let me see the room in which your father was killed?"

"Somehow, you inspire me with confidence, and I will do as you say in the matter. Yes, I will be glad to show you the room, and give you all the aid I can to further the ends of justice. Such a crime as this must not go unavenged, and woe to the guilty one when the people here get hold of him!"

"And woe to the innocent, too, if they happen to suspect one such," Dick added. Simon led the way to the floor above, where they entered a room that was now closed and darkened. He threw open one of the shutters and let in the light. It was a large room, finely furnished.

One of the windows opened directly over the front porch, and Dick gave a little close attention to that porch roof. He examined well the sill of the window, too, and the sash and sides. Stepping out, he also looked well to the edge of the roof and the posts.

What he found he did not communicate, but when he got back into the room, he said:

"The slayer of your father, Mr. Stephenson, was not a woman."

Simon looked at him in amaze.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"By the signs, which are plain enough, but which I do not care to explain at this time."

"You must be a detective, surely!" the young man exclaimed. "If you are, leave no stone unturned in your efforts to find the vile wretch. And if I can be of any help—"

"There is one way in which you can help me," said Dick.

"And how is that?"

"By having confidence in me. I have reason to believe now that you no longer look with suspicion upon me."

"You are right."

"Very well. In case anything further turns up against me, be ready to lend me your aid. As acting mayor of the town, you have power that you can exercise if it comes to a test."

"Certainly."

"Is there anything further you can say that will throw light upon the matter?"

"No, sir; not that I can think of."

"There was nothing in your father's past life that would raise up an enemy against him, think you?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. If I knew of anything, I would not hesitate to tell you. There is one thing I would like to know."

"Name it."

"Who you really are."

"Well, I am disposed to tell you, having measured you and found you not wanting. I am Deadwood Dick, Jr."

"Thank God!" the young man cried. "Now I am sure that the mystery can and will be cleared away. I will keep this secret, and you have only to direct me as you please."

They had a further and confidential talk, and parted.

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT VISIT.

"Ef you speak or move you ar' a dead man!"

Deadwood Dick awoke with a start, to

find himself in the hands of half a dozen masked and armed men.

The balance of the day had passed quietly, and as the day waned the excitement of the morning had seemed to die out. Dick had been quietly on the lookout for information.

After dinner he had had a further talk with Daisy Daisy, in which some new points had been brought out, but we have seen fit to pass it over. In the evening he had shown himself around town a little, boldly, and no one had offered to molest him. He had seen little of Jarrat.

He retired early, tired out with a long journey and the excitement following his arrival at Silver Valley.

Dropping quickly asleep, the first he knew was the rude awakening as described.

He took in the situation at a glance, and his native coolness stood by him.

What puzzled him was how the men had effected their entrance unheard.

He had made his door secure on going to bed.

Obeying the injunction to the letter, he neither moved nor spoke, for at least two guns were pressed against his head.

Seeing that he was inclined to pay heed to the warning, two of the men proceeded to bind his hands, a proceeding to which Dick did not offer the slightest resistance.

He had been caught, and knew there was no use kicking against such odds. His silence probably meant his life.

"Now, then, git up and dress yourself," the spokesman ordered, when they had made his hands secure.

"Will you allow me just a word?" Dick asked, in a low tone.

"Yas, ef you ar' quick."

"How do you expect me to dress myself with my hands tied?"

"Thunder! why didn't you say somethin' about et before?"

"You ordered me to say nothing, and I simply obeyed."

"Wull, loose him, an' ef he tries any trick he will git a couple of bullets so quick he won't know what hurt him!"

"I am not such a fool that I don't know when the other fellow holds the best hand," said Dick, as they cut his bonds and allowed him to get up. "What are you going to do with me?"

"We aire goin' to lodge ye in jail, that's what."

"Oh! is that all?"

"What did ye think?"

"I thought maybe you meant to lynch me, after all."

"No, et won't be lynch, now, but et will probably be hang, all right, after your trial."

"I will take my chances of that. Give me a little elbow room, so I can get into my duds. You needn't be afraid that I will vanish before your very eyes. I find you have helped yourselves to my guns."

"You bet we have!"

They had, and Dick did not need to feel in his pocket to be assured that they had taken the valuable paper, also.

Of that he made no mention, but dressed himself quickly and quietly, and in a few minutes announced that he was ready to go with them, when they again securely bound his hands.

All that had been said had been said in whispers, and not a sound had been made that could be heard outside of the room.

One of the men had been holding a lamp.

They stepped to the door, Dick a prisoner between two of them, and then for the first time Dick noticed that the door was secured just as he had left it on retiring.

He looked immediately to the windows, but they, too, appeared to be fastened the same as he had left them, and it was a matter of some curiosity with him to imagine how the men had gained their entrance, but he did not gratify them so much as to inquire.

"I know what your aire thinkin'," suggested one.

"Oh, do you?" said Dick.

"Yas, you are wonderin' how we got in hyar."

"That is nothing; why should I care how you got in? You did not scare me any, did you?"

"Wull, you won't find out, so we will call it even. You didn't seem to be surprised a whole lot, that's ther fact. Silence, now!"

This was said while the door was being carefully opened.

The man who carried the lamp now put it out, and they started along the hall in the darkness, two men holding fast to the prisoner.

Dick had noticed that the feet of his captors were muffled, being wrapped in folds of blanket, and he was not surprised that they made no sound as they advanced. And they whispered a caution to him to step lightly.

This order was carefully observed until they came to a certain door, where the prisoner suddenly stumbled, making considerable of a noise.

"Confound you!" one of the men hissed.

Dick said nothing, but passed along with them, and they reached the lower floor and the rear door without further mishap.

That stumbling had been no mishap, however. The room by whose door it had happened was occupied by Daisy Daisy, and if awake she would understand that something was going on.

Such a signal had been arranged, to be used if needed for any purpose whatever.

The rear door, too, was secured, but it took only a momnet to open it, and they passed out, all save one, who remained behind evidently to secure the door as it had been.

This left Dick five captors.

Numbers made no difference, however, the way he was bound.

The hour was probably late, for the streets appeared wholly deserted and all the lights were out, save a lone one here and there.

They proceeded to the jail, where a number of men were silently waiting in the shadows, and for a moment Dick felt a dread at heart that their real purpose had been concealed.

Still, he did not believe that his judgment had been so far misplaced, for what was to be gained by his lynching.

The acting mayor knew him now, and had publicly declared him innocent.

And he was not mistaken.

"Now, hyar we be," said the ringleader, on their arrival, "and hyar you are to stay till your trial, by order of ther citizens of this camp. We believe ye guilty, spite of what Simon Stephenson has said."

"It is all the same to me," said Dick, with pretended cheerfulness, "if there is a place here where I can continue my sleep. I am worrying more about that than anything else just now. I suppose you will free my hands when you lock the door upon me."

"You aire a cool one! Yas, we will free ye'r hands, fer ye can't hope' ter git away with ten good men to guard ye'r crib."

"Never trouble yourselves about that part of it; all I am after is sleep."

He was hustled into the calaboose, and there his hands were freed and the door

was swung to and made secure on the outside.

And, to all appearances, that was the only opening the place had, for there did not appear to be a window anywhere, which suspicion was confirmed when Dick lighted a match and looked around.

There was a rude bunk, reasonably clean, and Dick sat down on that as the match went out.

He then felt for the paper in his pocket.

"Just what I thought," he said to himself. "A very pretty ruse, and all to get possession of that paper again. I ought to thank my stars that I was not murdered the same as Stephenson, I suppose. But that was not their game this time; he had to be put out of the way. They think they can fool me. Well, maybe they can. We will see."

He heard them talking outside for a few minutes, in low tones, and then a part of them went away, the rest remaining.

Early next morning the acting mayor was brought to the jail.

A committee had waited upon him to inform him of the action of the citizens respecting the suspected man.

When the door was opened, what was the blank amaze of every one to find the place empty, and no sign of the prisoner anywhere. The door had been found locked; the guard swore by all the gods that they had not been asleep; what had become of Gold Belt? That was a puzzler!

CHAPTER XI.

DAISY DAISY CHIPS IN.

The leader among those who had brought the mayor to the spot was Job Jarrat.

"Thar' has been some trickery hyar!" Jarrat roared. "Youse fellers has sold out and let him go, that's what et is, and ye needn't swear to any more lies!"

"No, run me fer guy'n'r ef et is any trick," declared the foremost of the guardsmen. "We have watched hyar, jest as you said, and ef he is gone he has vanished, that's ther long and short of et."

"Well, hang et, can't ye see he's gone? Simon Stephenson, I tell ye these hyar galoots hev' sold out, and they desarve to be hanged, every blasted one of 'em! Ye'r father's murderer is again at large, and thar' is no tellin' whar' he will plant his knife next time."

"Have I not told you that I do not believe him guilty?" Simon demanded.

"And don't et stand to reason that you aire mistaken?" demanded Jarrat. "We, ther people, think different, and we acted on et!"

"Yes, and locked him up contrary to my expressed wish. The murdered man was my father, which above all else should have given my expressed wish some weight in the matter."

"And he was our mayor, and we all liked him mighty well, which gives us some rights in regard to any one who is suspected of his murder," retorted Jarrat. "I am goin' to hunt him down and bring him to trial, and I give ye due notice of et, too! What say, boyees?"

"That's ther idee!" cried those around, guardsmen and all.

Just then another personage appeared.

It was Daisy Daisy.

She was up early, and looked as fresh and bright as the flower from which she was doubly named.

"What's the rumpus here, good citizens?" she nonchalantly demanded. "Why for all this seeming excitement on this bright and beautiful morn?"

"Enough is ther rumpus, that's what," gruffly growled Jarrat.

The girl turned to the acting mayor.

"It seems these men locked Gold Belt

up here last night," said the mayor, "and now this morning they find him missing."

"Oh! is that all? I am not surprised at that, after what I saw of the man yesterday. Which way did he get out, citizens? Did he kick off the roof, rip up the floor, bulge out an end, or what?"

"Look an' see," growled Jarrat.

Daisy looked.

"Wonderful!" she cried. "You don't mean to tell me he vanished, do you? Well, I am not greatly surprised, after all."

"Maybe you had a hand in it," growled Jarrat.

"Yes, maybe I had, but if you can't prove it you might as well not mention it."

"Had you?"

"Maybe I had."

"Confound you, gal! I believe you are as bad as that feller himself!"

"If you don't class me as any worse I am satisfied," was the cool rejoinder. "What are you going to do about it?"

"He will find out, when we git holt of him," snarled Jarrat.

"And maybe you will experience something of the same again, as you did yesterday," said Daisy Daisy, smiling.

"Ef you was a man, I'd knock ye flat!" roared Job.

"Don't stop on that account, if you want to try it," the dashing girl sport coolly invited. "You want to keep a sharp eye out for snags, if you do, though. I give you fair warning."

"Wull, thar's no use foolin' time hyar," growled Jarrat, turning away.

"I guess you are right," said the girl, aside.

Jarrat went off in one direction, his followers at his heels, excepting the guardsmen, with whom he was out, and Simon Stephenson and Daisy Daisy went off in another.

"I guess they are puzzled a trifle," said the girl.

"A good deal, I should say," responded the acting mayor. "Did you get the paper?"

"No, it was not in his shanty; he must have it on his person. We must try some other plan. We'll wait till to-night, and then pay him a visit, I guess. But, I have a thought."

"What is it?"

"Suppose they have taken the prisoner and hanged him, and are making this fuss merely for effect?"

"Ha! I did not think of that. What if I charge them with it, and see what they will have to say? It will turn public opinion against them to a large extent, for the majority are not with them."

"Try it."

"Hi! Jarrat!"

Jarrat stopped short and looked.

"Wull, what's wanted?" he demanded, with a snarl.

"I want to speak to you," responded Simon, going in his direction.

The girl sport followed after, and on coming to where Jarrat and his followers stood, the acting mayor said:

"Say, there is something mighty mysterious about all this, the more that I come to think of it, anl—"

"Wull, I should say so!" cried Jarrat. "Ain't that what I was tryin' to tell ye?"

"If you locked the man in the jail, as you said, how did he get out?"

"That's ther question."

"But if you lynched him, and this is only done for effect, then there is not so much mystery about it—"

"Thunder 'n' lightnin'! we ain't done nothin' of ther kind!"

"I hope you haven't."

"I swear to et."

"Then the question is, where is the man? You have admitted going to the

hotel and taking him from his room, and you are the one responsible for him."

Job Jarrat was somewhat pale, but he had grit.

"And we done with him jest what I told ye," he declared, stoutly. "Ef he has been lynched et was them cusses at ther jail what done et."

"Did you take anything away from him?"

"His guns."

"Anything else?"

"No."

"What about the paper he had, that was stolen from my father?"

"Don't know nothin' about et."

"Well, I hope you are telling the truth, Job, but if that fellow doesn't turn up, and it turns out that he had no part in my father's murder, you may have to stand accountable for him."

"Yer don't mean et!"

"I do."

"Well, I don't know nothin' about him more'n I have told, that is ther gospel truth, and they kin make out of et what they please."

"And, by the way, Job."

"What now?"

"Where is your daughter?"

"How sh'u'd I know?"

"You ought to know, if anybody, being her father."

"Wull, I don't. She has skinned out and left me, and I reckon has run off with some feller."

"The wonder is that she did not run off long ago, if all reports of your dealings with her be true," Simon fearlessly commented.

"What d'ye mean?" roared Jarrat, bristling up and doubling his fists. "Ef et wasn't fer sp'ilin' your beauty fer ther funeral, dast me ef I wouldn't paste ye!"

"No, I don't think you would," spoke up Daisy Daisy.

She had drawn a gun, anticipating trouble, and she held it leveled at the man's head.

"What funeral is this hyar of your'n?" demanded Jarrat, furiously. "You had better 'tend to your own business and look out fer ye'rself. You will have plenty to do."

"Oh, I can do that all right, and still have a little spare time to devote to fellows of your stripe. You had better pull in your horns now, and amble off about your business. Perhaps the next mysterious disappearance will be your own, if we don't watch you."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK CALLS A TURN.

Job Jarrat glared at the girl as if he could eat her.

Daisy Daisy had the drop on him in the daisiest kind of way, however, so he had to smother his desire.

"If it isn't your own," he grated. "You are too fresh around here, and I have a sneaking suspicion that you know a good deal more about things than most folks think."

"In which you may be just a little bit more than half right," the girl playfully agreed.

"What did you mean by what ye said?"

"Just what I said."

"And why should I disappear?"

"That is the question—why should you?"

The look he gave her boded ill for Daisy Daisy, and he turned on his heel and walked off.

He looked back once, but the girl sport was still looking after him with her gun in hand, and with a scowl on his face he continued his way in the direction of his shanty, where a surprise awaited him.

Daisy Daisy and Simon Stephenson went to the hotel, where they sat down on the piazza.

"What do you make out of that fellow?" Simon asked her.

"It is hard to tell, he being a stranger to me," the girl responded.

"I thought I knew him well enough, but I never knew him to take such interest in any matter before."

"The whole camp has taken interest, it seems, so that counts for little," rejoined the girl. "He may have held your father in high esteem."

"It is true that they were intimate."

"Ah! Is that so."

"Yes."

"Then that spoils a little theory I was building up."

"And what was that?"

"That it was this man who murdered your father."

"Heavens, no! Job Jarret? Oh, no! that cannot be! You wrong him there, I think."

"It is quite likely that I do, if he and your father were intimate and on good terms. It was only a mere theory I was building, anyhow."

"What was your theory?"

"No matter now, save that I thought his active interest might be for the purpose of diverting suspicion from himself. If he could hang somebody for the deed, that would settle it."

"That is not unreasonable, supposing him guilty, but you will have to get strong proof before you can make anybody believe that."

"It is not likely that my idea is right, I suppose."

They talked on for a little time, when Simon excused himself and said he must return home.

About the time he had gone, Mr. Solon Shank appeared and made his way to where Daisy Daisy was sitting, making her a profound bow as he approached.

"Good-morning, fair lady!" he greeted.

"Ditto to you," the girl sport responded, in an off-hand fashion.

"How does this bright morning find you, and all like that? Will you permit me to sit down here, or something like that?"

"Oh, it finds me kicking," was the rejoinder. "Yes, sit down, if you want to, certainly, or something like that, Mr. Shanks; you have as much right here as anybody, I take it."

"Shank, fair lady, not Shanks," as he took a chair.

"Only one Shank, eh? Well, it is all the same in Dutch, I take it. You are pretty tall, anyhow."

"Well, yes, rather tall, or something like that, that is true," the fellow acknowledged. "I hope you admire tall men, Miss—Miss—Miss—" floundering for a name.

"Call me Miss Mystery, if you want to, Mr. Shank."

"Ah! that is a name, certainly. I was going to say, I hope you admire tall men, Miss Mystery, or something like that."

"Oh, yes, very much, indeed, Mr. Shank."

"Ah! is it possible, and all like that? I am delighted, or something like that! You encourage me, and so on like that."

"You are easily delighted and encouraged, then, Mr. Shank, I must say. By the way, did you have any hand in the arrest of Gold Belt last evening? Can you tell me where he is?"

"Indeed, no! Is he missing?"

"Yes, he is not to be found this morning, and I desire to see him."

"I have not seen him, on my honor. Indeed, I know nothing about what you mention. What is it all?"

She gave him the particulars.

"That is very strange, or something like that," he commented. "May I—may I ask a question, and all like that?"

"Certainly."

"Is—is he your—your lover?"

"Bless you, no; I have no lover, Mr. Shank."

"Ah! Ah! Is it possible—can it be possible—that—"

"Speak right out, Mr. Shank; don't be bashful. If there is anything I hate it is bashfulness, especially in a tall man."

"Ah! that is encouraging, and all like that. Is it possible that he is your husband? Is it—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" merrily. "No, he is not. I am single and fancy free, Mr. Shank. Why, I could marry you, if I took the notion, and there would be nothing in the way."

"Indeed, indeed! That is encouraging, and so on, like that. I—I—I—Really, I must excuse myself, for I am quite overcome, or something like that."

He rose suddenly and bowed himself from her presence.

"I guess I scared him off," Daisy Daisy said to herself, with a laugh. "Probably that was what he was coming at, or something like that— Ha, ha! And my opening so strong was too much for him. Poor fool!"

At that moment the call to breakfast sounded, and she entered the hotel and sought the dining room.

In the mean time Job Jarret had been having a little adventure.

On entering his shanty, where, as said, a surprise awaited him, he discovered that surprise in the form of Gold Belt, alive and in the flesh.

He was sitting on a chair just back of the door, so that his discovery was not made until Jarret had closed the door, and at sight of him Mr. Jarret gave something of a start, as well he might.

Gold Belt had a gun in his hand, and its tube was looking straight at the man when he turned around.

"Good-morning," Dick greeted, calmly.

"How the—"

"There, now, don't use any strong language," said Dick. "Sit down and let us have a chat. I had a peculiar dream last night and I want you to interpret it for me."

"What the—"

"No strong language, I tell you; it is not called for. I dreamed last night that you and some other fellows invaded my room and took me off to jail, where you left me under guard. It seemed as real as if it was actually so, but I awoke in bed all right this morning."

"The—"

"Now, now, why won't you forego such language? It was a peculiar dream, and I can hardly make myself believe that it was not so. In fact, there is one strong circumstance that seems to remove all doubt. A paper that I had in my pocket is missing. If you can put me in the way of finding that, it may throw some light upon the matter—"

"What the—"

"I see you are determined to persist. I have come for that paper."

Mr. Jarret fairly exploded now, and in a manner calculated to lift the roof, if anything in the shape of strong language could do it.

"You say you know nothing about it, but that does not satisfy me," said Dick, when he subsided. "I am going to search you, and the less fuss you make about it, the better."

"You aire goin' to search me?"

"That is what I said, and there is a lead pill in this gun that will find you if you resist. See?"

"No, I don't see. If you undertake it thar' will be two of us, unless you put the bullet into me before ye begin. You had better take fair warnin' and git out while ye kin walk."

For rejoinder, Dick rose to his feet.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOB TAKES HOLD.

It was a game of nerve and muscle.

Job Jarret took a step backward and squared himself.

Deadwood Dick advanced a step, with his gun aimed at the man's forehead.

"Sit right down on that chair," he ordered, "or off goes the dome of your thinker! You gave me no show yesterday, and I will give you none now."

"Blaze away, then, and be blamed to ye!" yelled Jarret, in voice loud enough to be heard half way to the hotel. And it was plain to be seen that it was his desire to draw attention.

"All right, if you will have it so," said Dick, stepping back half a pace and taking a squint along the threatening tube. "I did not want to do it, really, but if that is your choice, why I may as well oblige you, I suppose. Shut your eyes, if you—"

Jarret gave a yell and leaped aside.

His nerve was not equal to the test, and he did not dare to hold out as he had begun.

He was a fighter, however, and scarcely had he made one leap when another followed it, and this time it was straight at Gold Belt's throat.

Dick let out his left fist, without seeming exertion, and tapped the man on the forehead, when he went tumbling backward over the stove and came down all in a heap in the far corner.

Hardly had he landed, however, when there was the bark of a gun, and Dick felt the wind of a pill as it passed his face.

Jarret had jerked out a gun, even while falling, and had blazed away before making an effort to get up.

Dick jumped aside, and in the same moment there was another spiteful crack from the same quarter, and another bullet gave Gold Belt a close call. He was tempted to return the fire with interest.

He did not do so, however, but dodged this way and that, drawing near to Jarret at each dodge, and when another shot was fired he leaped forward and landed upon his man with the suddenness of a panther and wrested the gun out of his grasp. It was then man to man.

"That was pretty good," Gold Belt observed, "but not quite good enough. I will now proceed to carry out my programme, if you please—or whether you do or not, that makes no difference."

"You will, eh?" between closed teeth.

"Yes."

Jarret put forth all his strength, but he had a tough customer to deal with, as he should have known, and, as of course, he did know.

The man did his best to throw Dick off, but that was useless, so he contented himself with trying to resist the search Dick had promised to make, but he could not do even that.

Little by little Dick straightened him out on the floor, till finally he had him flat on his back, with his knees on the fellow's arms.

"Now, there you are," Gold Belt remarked.

"Cuss ye!"

"Oh, you have done that already; that does not amount to anything. Now, let us see about that paper."

Dick proceeded to search his pockets, but the paper was not on his person, and he knew it was not in the shanty.

"What have you done with it?" he angrily demanded.

"I never had it," was the reply.

"Yes, you did, too; you took it from my pocket."

"If you kin prove that I done et, go ahead. You don't seem to find et, do ye?"

After all, the fellow had the best of the situation, it seemed.

Gold Belt relieved him of his guns and allowed him to get up, which he did promptly enough.

"You got ther best of me that time," he growled, "but you won't never do et again. I give ye fair warnin' that ye had better make ye'rself scarce around Silver Valley, now."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'll git even with ye, ef ye stay hyar."

"All right, then you will have a chance to do that, for I am going to stay!"

"Then ye may as well speak fer ye'r coffin, fer I swear that ye shall hang fer the murder of Stephenson."

"I'll take my chances of that. By the way, what has become of your daughter?"

"None of ye'r business!"

"Maybe not, but she disappeared at a bad time, after she had threatened Mr. Stephenson's life on one occasion."

"She done that?"

"Yes."

"I never heard of et, and I don't believe et."

"Nevertheless, it is true, and she is likely to get into trouble on account of it, if they can get hold of her."

"Wull, let her, ef she ain't got no better sense'n to let ye ketch her—that is, ef she done et, which I don't believe at all. When ye do git her, let me know, wull ye?"

"You will know it all right, I guess."

Dick opened the door and backed out of the room, closing the door after him.

There was quite a crowd on the street in front, drawn there by Jarrat's loud voice and the shots that had been fired, and at sight of Dick they appeared to receive a shock of surprise.

"Holy Mosey!" exclaimed one, "ain't you dead?"

"Do I look dead?" Dick asked. "See anything dead about me?"

"No, but we thought ye was, fer certain. What ye been doin' to Job Jarrat?"

"Oh, he is all right, that is to say, he isn't more'n half dead. You can hand him his guns when I get out of range, if you please."

"All right, boss."

Dick handed the guns to a fellow whose face he thought he could rely upon, and passed on his way to the hotel, not once looking back—which required considerable nerve.

Reaching the hotel, he entered and went to breakfast.

"Hello!" greeted Daisy Daisy. "Good-morning! I thought you must be dead, or something like that—as our friend So-long Shanks would say."

The latter raised a laugh among the others present at the board.

"No, not quite dead yet," said Dick.

"What luck?"

"No luck at all."

"Didn't have it, eh?"

"No."

None of the others would have known what was meant, even had they overheard the words, but this was said in low tones.

Gold Belt sat down beside Daisy Daisy, where there was a vacant place at the table, and they entered into further conversation along the same line, all of which need not be quoted.

"Well, where do you suppose that paper can be?" the girl asked.

"One of his partners must have it, I take it," said Dick. "I shall have to learn who they are."

"That fellow Potts is one; have you seen him around this morning?"

"No, that's so, I haven't."

"Maybe he has vamoosed with it."

"As likely as not. I must find out."

After breakfast Dick went up to the Stephenson cottage, leaving Daisy Daisy there at the hotel.

He asked for Simon Stephenson, and was immediately shown in, the servant remembering him and how he had been received on the day before.

"Something new?" Simon asked.

"Well, yes and no. They have got that paper."

"Then that was the object of it all, eh?"

"Don't it look so?"

"It certainly does."

"And it was. It was a trick on the part of Jarrat. He cared nothing about my being in jail, but he did want that paper, and I want you to tell me who his most intimate companions are."

Simon named them, three or four fellows, including Jackson Potts, and while he was doing so there came a loud knock at the door. This was followed by a subdued hum of voices, and, looking out, they saw a great mob of men in the street before the house, all with guns in hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"What can this mean, I wonder?" questioned Simon Stephenson.

"I think it means another circus for me," answered Deadwood Dick, grimly. "I'll bet Jarrat is back of it, somewhere."

"You think so?"

"I certainly do."

"Maybe you are right, for there is Pete White, the half-breed, one of the fellows I was just telling you about."

"Ha! is that so? Which one is he? I have heard of him before."

"That fellow with the Indian hair and rusty skin. I have not seen him before in a long time. There is another knock. I'll have to go down. What shall I say if they want you?"

"I won't put you to the trouble of saying anything; I'll speak for myself. I am going down with you."

"But maybe they have come to lynch you."

"All right, I'll take my chances of it. I have been lynched more times than I have got fingers and toes, and I am still on deck."

"Yes, but there is danger—"

"And this is no place for them to be making their racket, with death in the house. Come on."

Dick led the way down the stairs.

A servant had by this time opened the door, and a voice was saying:

"Et don't make no difference; you tell him to git himself out hyar in a double quick hurry, d'yé hear?"

"Who is wanted, fellow?" cried Dick.

"You aire, that's who."

"And is this the way to come to a house where mourning is? Have you no respect for the dead?"

"We ain't got no respect fer ther man what murdered Mayor Stephenson, you will find when we git holt of ye again! Come, show ye'rself out hyar, or we'll riddle ye whar' ye stand."

Dick had not stopped, but now reached the door, and the first thing he did was to give that loud-mouthed ruffian a shove that sent him backward off the porch.

Gold Belt was there, with his brace of guns out and ready for action.

And, somehow, they could not tell how

it had happened, he had the drop on the whole crowd of them.

They had allowed their attention to be drawn for a moment to the fellow who had been toppled over, and in that moment Dick had covered them and now his full voice demanded:

"What is the meaning of this demonstration, people of Silver Valley?"

"Et means that now we have got proof that you are the man what killed Mr. Stephenson," spoke up Job Jarrat.

"Oh! it is you, is it, my friend? I thought as much. Well, suppose we go elsewhere to have this matter out. There is death in this house, you must remember, if you have any respect for death."

"We ain't got none fer ther man what made et hyar, that's sartain."

"Will you go elsewhere with me to have it out?"

"You bet we wull! We don't mean ter hang ye right hyar on ther porch."

"Well, that's generous of you, I must say. You seem to speak as if you had a sure thing of it, and were going to hang me whether or not. I guess I will have a word to say about that."

"You won't have much ter say. You put up them ar' guns an' surrender!"

"Well, hardly, my friends."

"Then what aire ye goin' ter do about et?"

"I shall fight it out. What is this new proof you claim to have?"

"Ther proof is right hyar," said Jarrat, with a wave of the hand in the direction of the half-breed.

"That thing?" asked Dick.

"Yas, that thing! He has jest come to town, and he knows somethin' about this hyar crime. He heard you and that gal talkin' about et, the night et was done, and thar' is proof ter hang both of ye!"

"You lying cur!" cried Dick, in hot passion. "For one cent I would send a bullet hunting for you where you stand this minute! But, then, it is not your doings; the lie was made up for you by some one else. I say it is a lie, and I am here to back it up!"

He glared at the crowd, and more than one pair of eyes fell before his sharp gaze.

"Will ye surrender?" cried Jarrat.

"Never!"

"Then, boys, at him! We hate ter do et hyar, Simon Stephenson, but we loved ye'r dad and we are after vengeance."

"Back, all of you!" cried Simon, leaping out and taking his stand at Dick's side. "I have better proof of this man's innocence than you have of his guilt, and I tell you you are wrong!"

"He has been stuffin' your head, young man!" cried Jarrat. "What is your proof?"

"This man is Deadwood Dick, Jr., the famous detective."

Jarrat turned as pale as death instantly.

"Haw! haw! haw!" he forced a laugh. "That is ther best I ever heers, that is! He has lied to ye, Simon, that's what he's done! He ain't no more Deadwood Dick 'n what I be!"

"How do you know?"

"I have seen Deadwood Dick more'n a dozen times."

"You lie, straight!" spoke up Dick. "You never knew me till this minute. Now that it is out, I will own to the name."

"Boys, he are a mighty liar!" bellowed Jarrat. "This is his way of gettin' out of a bad fix. Aire we goin' to take any stock in that, when we have the dead sure proof to the contrary?"

"No! no!"

"Course we ain't! Charge him!"

Dick's revolvers came to a finer bead upon the foremost.

"You had better think twice about that little scheme before you undertake it," he warned.

And it was evident that they thought they had better take his advice, for they held back and showed no inclination to obey the order.

"As acting mayor of this town," said Simon, "I request you to go away in a quiet manner, for you are making a mistake here and one that no good can come of. This man is Deadwood Dick, Jr."

"You believe that?" cried Jarrat.

"I know it."

At that moment three other personages stepped out of the door upon the porch, all with weapons in hand.

They were first, Daisy Daisy, and with her Zeb Marvin and Billy Millroy, who had returned to the camp after having been out on the trail to get trace of the missing Ellen Jarrat.

They had entered the house by the rear way.

Seeing this increase of force, and seeing also an easy way of getting out of the position he had taken, Jarrat retorted:

"Then ther bla.ne rest on you. I wash my hands of ther 'hull business, Simon Stephenson. I am only sorry that it ain't your father alive instead of you, then that would be no foolin'!"

"There will be no fooling as it is, if I can help it," was the parting shot.

Jarrat wheeled and marched off, and his horde with him.

Their latest scheme had signally failed.

"Still at it, are they?" said Daisy Daisy. "They will play with the fire till they get their fingers burned, if they don't look out."

"They are as good as burned already," said Dick.

"I believe you."

"Well, Millroy, what is the word?"

"Failure, sir," was the sad response. "We cannot track her."

"That is bad, but I think there will be a way of getting on her track in a little while."

"You do? How?"

"Let me have a word with you in private," drawing him aside. "If the girl loved you she will write to you, and that letter will be the clew by which I can trace her for you."

"I never thought of that; that is what she will do, certain. And yet, if she has any reason to hide away, she won't."

"Then we'll find her anyhow, I pledge you that. I want you and your pard to aid me now."

"And we are ready ter do et, you can count on that every time!"

CHAPTER XV.

SOLON SHANK'S VALOR.

Simon Stephenson invited them to come into the house.

All accepted, and he led the way to the sitting-room before mentioned.

There all took seats, and Simon was about to speak when there was a great clatter in the hall, accompanied by the protesting voice of a servant and another voice, saying:

"I tell you I must, I must! I will die for her, if need be, or something like that! I demand admission immediately, and all like that."

"It is So-long Shanks!" exclaimed Daisy Daisy.

"Come to die for you," whispered Dick.

"Yes, I believe you are right."

The door was thrown open, and into the room came Solon Shank, armed with an old army musket, which had made the clatter in the hall by his dropping it.

"I am here!" he exclaimed, with a bow. "Where danger is, there I am, or something like that. Fair lady, danger threatens you, and I am here to prove my devotion, and all like that!"

"I certainly thank you, sir," assured Daisy Daisy.

"Which amply repays me, and so on like that. I am here to do or to die, in your defense, and all like that. I heard them threaten to lynch you, or something like that, and I armed myself and set forth immediately, and so on like that. Not a head of your hair shall they harm!"

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Shanks!"

"Shank, if you please."

"Your pardon; I was thinking of your length again. Shank by name and shanks by nature, you see! Easily confounded."

"If you will be seated, Mr. Shank," said Simon, waving to a chair.

"Yes, to be sure, or something like that. My place is here, for this lady shall not go out of my protecting sight again while danger exists, and all like that. From this hour will I devote my life to her. It is pardonable, I am sure, or something like that."

"Of course, Mr. Shank," assented Daisy.

"And I have heard of your being afflicted the same way before," suggested Simon Stephenson. "If you will now subside—"

"Or something like that," said Daisy Daisy, aside.

"We will go on with the business in hand. Mr. Bristol, what have you to suggest? What is the right thing to do, under the circumstances? I infer that you have a suspicion now."

"Yes, I have! Job Jarrat is the man who killed your father!"

"Can it be possible?"

"I can swear to it. Did you not notice how sickly he turned when you mentioned my name?"

"Yes, I did notice that. But, what was the motive? If it was to gain possession of that paper, why was it not in his possession? How came it into your hands?"

"You know that his daughter has disappeared."

"Certainly."

"Well, she may have discovered her father's secret, and, unwilling longer to remain beneath the same roof with him, may have taken the paper from him and run away."

"I believe you are right," asserted Billy Millroy. "I never thought of that."

"I may be wrong," admitted Dick, "but that is the way it looks to me now."

"Ten to a dozen that you are right," agreed Daisy Daisy. "That would be the natural thing for the girl to do, if she is true blue and honest, as they say of her. That makes it plain."

"Then, what is to be done?" asked Simon.

"Arrest Job Jarrat, b'gosh!" answered Zeb Marvin.

"No, not yet; it is too soon," demurred Dick. "We must get hold of that paper first."

"Right ye aire, pardner!"

"We must also keep secret what has been said here, and must act as soon as we can. I will get on the track of that paper, and when I find out where it is there will be music."

"Have you seen that fellow Potts?" asked Daisy.

"No, not yet—"

"And ye won't," spoke up Zeb Marvin. "We met him goin' out of town when we kem in, 'bout a dozen miles from hyår."

"Then he is the man who has that paper," declared Deadwood Dick, positively. "We must take his trail, boys, and run him down, and get it."

"We kin do et," averred Zeb.

"Bet your life we kin, and will!" echoed Billy.

"Don't you think it would be well to arrest Jarrat at once, then?" suggested Stephenson.

"I don't know but you are right, now that we know pretty certain where the paper is," agreed Dick. "That is going to be a ticklish job, though, and if—"

"There are men enough in the camp who are of the right stuff yet," interrupted Simon. "A score of them can do the job, if necessary, and he will not have the ghost of a chance to do damage."

"You did not hear me out," explained the detective. "I said it would be a ticklish job, and I was going to add that, if you did not care, I would undertake it myself, so as not to put any one else in danger. I think I can bring him to time."

"With his right bower to back him," spoke up Daisy Daisy. "Come on, Gold Belt, and if he goes to cutting up we will knock spots off him right and left!"

"And you kin count on us, too," chipped in Zeb Marvin, indicating himself and Billy Millroy. "We ain't ther kind to shirk our part when et comes to a pinch, eh, Billy?"

"You bet! This is onpleasant fer me, under the circumstances, but I feel et to be my duty."

"You need not take any part in it, engaged as you are to the daughter," assumed Dick. "That would be rough, if she knew of it; not but what it is just and right, if Jarrat is guilty."

"No, you need not serve," advised Daisy Daisy. "I will take your place, and you bet I will do your part!"

"And where do I come in, or something like that?" asked Mr. Shank. "What would it look like for me to allow you to rush into danger and I remain in the rear, and all like that?" to Daisy Daisy.

"It would not look very brave, Mr. Shanks."

"Shank, if you please—one Shank only. No, of course it would not, and so I demand a place in your line, or something like that, and we will land our man in jail before he knows it, and all like that. In fact, fair lady, I demand that you remain behind and let me take your place, or something like that."

"No, you can't fix it that way, Mr. One-Shank-Only; I have got to be in it or it won't be complete, you see."

"Well, it shall not be said that I played the poltroon."

"Brave man!"

Mr. Shank was upon his feet, and patted his old musket in an affectionate manner.

"You have all had your little say; now let me have mine," now put in Dick. "I can take care of this man myself, but, if you like, you may be within calling distance, in case of accident."

"We will! we will!" cried Shank.

"Then, Mr. Stephenson, we will take leave of you," and Dick arose. "I am sorry that so much confusion should have been brought to this house of mourning, but it was forced upon us."

"Do not mention it, sir."

"The funeral is this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, after that you will be at liberty, and you will join us in the hunt for the hidden treasure."

"I will not promise, sir. If it can be shown that Miss Bassatt has the best right to it, I shall wash my hands of the matter."

"And if it cannot be positively shown that it is mine, I will have nothing to do with it unless you will agree to take half," declared Daisy Daisy, with a show of spirit.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATAL SHOT.

This was left an open matter.

They took leave of the cottage, Dick and Daisy Daisy by the front way, the others by the rear.

Mr. Shank had protested against that, but had given in under Dick's judgment, and they went back to the camp center in two parties, Dick and Daisy Daisy leading.

The most frequented saloon of the camp was the Corn Crib, the headquarters of Job Jarrat and men of his sort. So called, the proprietor explained, because men could there get corned if they wanted to. And certainly it did a big business in the "corning" line.

Dick believed that there he would find Jarrat.

It was like going into the lion's den to venture there, but then Deadwood Dick was a lion himself.

Straight to the Corn Crib he and Daisy Daisy walked, and entered. Dick had desired the girl to remain behind, but she had positively refused, so he had to allow her to accompany him.

Zeb Marvin and Billy Millroy followed after, but did not enter, taking up their positions in front.

Mr. Shank went around to the rear.

He thought somebody should be on hand there, or something like that.

When Dick and his right bower entered the place, every eye was turned upon them immediately, and a murmur of wonderment arose.

Deadwood Dick, sweeping his eyes over the crowd, singled out Job Jarrat in no time, where he was talking with Pete White and two or three others.

Dick strode forward, straight in among them all, and some of them showed their teeth like hyenas.

Daisy Daisy was right with him.

"Mr. Jarrat, a word with you," saluted Dick.

"Wull, what is et?" was growled.

"Your daughter has been found."

"You lie, blame ye!"

"Do I? She has made a clean breast of everything!"

Jarrat was pale, and his hand showed an inclination to work around to his hip.

"What was et, then? Did she run off with some cuss, same as I said? Does she want me ter take her back home again, after such cuttin' up? Wull, I reckon she misses her guess!"

"Very well assumed," Dick returned, "but it won't pass for genuine. She has confessed that she stole a certain paper from you, and ran away—"

"She lies! I had no paper for her to steal!"

"You had the paper you had taken from Mr. Stephenson when you murdered him, and she, knowing of your crime—"

It was guesswork on Dick's part, or nearly so, but he wanted to see what the effect would be upon the man. It might decide his guilt or innocence without further effort.

His face grew like death; a damp appeared on his forehead, and no further proof was wanted to satisfy Dick, in his own mind, that he had struck the nail fairly on the head. The man's jaws dropped for a second, but in the next second he pulled himself together.

"It's a lie—a lie!" he screamed. "She has done et herself, if you didn't do et, and wants ter put et on me! No wonder she has lighted out! But, by ther great gorgeous—"

Like a flash he jerked a gun and fired.

Dick had his guns out the same moment, but he received a blow on the side of his head that rendered him half dizzy.

With the shot fired by Jarrat came a cry of pain directly behind Dick, and Daisy Daisy, with one hand pressing her chest, staggered to a chair and fell upon it, wounded.

The signal agreed upon to call Zeb and Billy had been a pistol shot.

They came dashing in, shouting as they came, and making enough noise for a round dozen.

Job Jarrat was already making for the rear door, which he reached at the same moment that Solon Shank reached it without, and there was a terrific collision.

The old musket went off, with a roar that echoed like a small cannon in the saloon, but it did no damage further than to blow a sizable hole in the pine ceiling of the room, and a blow from Job's fist sent Mr. Shank spinning end over end on the ground.

Then Jarrat leaped over him and was off like the wind.

Deadwood Dick was after him, calling on others to stop him, but men got in the way and the fellow escaped.

Zeb Marvin made an effort in the same direction, but Job had too many friends there, and the way was effectually blocked until he had had time to get well out of reach.

But immediately all attention was being given to Daisy Daisy.

That the bullet should have done its deadly work upon her rather appalled the rough denizens, as they looked upon her beautiful face.

Deadwood Dick forced his way to her.

She looked up at him and smiled faintly, and he caught her words:

"I tried to do my part, pardner, but it seems I was destined to get knocked out of the game."

"Are you hit hard?" asked Dick.

"I'm afraid so, pard."

"I'll hunt that cur to the gates of Hades for this!" Dick fiercely vowed. "I will show him no mercy, either! Make way, men, and let us carry this lady out into the open air."

They were slow to obey, and Dick leaped upon a table, all the tiger in his nature now fully awakened.

"Clear the way!" he thundered, and his voice and manner made men cower before his presence. "Clear the way, or by the living greatness if I don't clear it with these guns!"

His dark, magnetic eyes seemed fairly to emit sparks, and a passage was made, broad and wide, to the doors, in no time.

"Carry her," Dick ordered Billy and Zeb.

They took the girl up in their arms, and Dick leading the way with his brace of guns in hand, they passed out of the den.

"Where to?" asked Billy.

"The hotel?" queried Zeb.

"No, to the Stephenson cottage," Dick directed.

"That is better," Billy agreed. "There she will get good care."

"Yes, and there she will be heartily welcomed, I feel certain," assured the detective.

True, there was death in the house, but this brave girl had been cut down while doing her duty toward avenging that death.

"I hope she will pull through," said Zeb, as they proceeded.

"Has any one gone fer ther doctor?" reminded Billy.

"If there is a doctor in your camp, let him be summoned immediately," was Dick's order.

Just then a long, lank individual caught up with the procession, all covered with dust, and with his face swollen and bleeding.

It was the remains of Mr. Solon Shank, after his collision with Job Jarrat in the manner described. He was still clinging to the old musket, and he made a sorry sight.

"What is this I hear, and all like that?" he demanded.

He pushed through, and caught sight of the pale face of Daisy Daisy.

"My love, my life!" he shouted. "Would that I had been near thy side at the moment, or something like that! This would not have happened."

"So-long, Shanksey!" spoke the girl, feebly, despite the pain she was evidently suffering. And she lifted her hand and flirted it at him feebly. "Maybe we will meet over the range."

"And that very soon!" screamed the long lover. "If you die, I will kill myself, or something like that! I could not live without you, and all like that! Oh! I shall go mad, and so on like that! If you only knew the feeling I have for you, and all like that—"

"Bah! get out with you!" cried some one who evidently knew him and his particular weakness. "You will get over it in two hours and be ready for the next arrival. Get out of the way here with your noise."

And Mr. Solon Shank was thereupon hustled out of the crowd without ceremony.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN A DESPERATE STRAIT.

As they approached the cottage, Dick requested the crowd to drop behind.

This was done, out of respect for the living and the dead alike, and owing to a change of feeling that was taking place.

The camp was getting its eyes open to the fact that this man Dick and his girl pard were really more sinned against than sinning, so far as the murder of Mr. Stephenson was concerned.

Reaching the house, Dick knocked, and the door was opened by Simon Stephenson himself.

"My God!" he cried. "What has happened?"

"This girl has been shot," explained Dick, "and as nothing but the best care can pull her through, I have brought her here."

"I am glad you have. Bring her this way, and the women of the house shall take care of her immediately. Has the doctor been summoned? She shall have every possible attention."

So the wounded girl was carried to one of the best rooms the cottage afforded, where the willing women servants took charge of her, and the doctor reaching the house a few minutes later, was shown immediately to that room, where he found his patient in bed.

Those below waited for the doctor's report, as did the crowd without, and when the doctor finally made his appearance and announced that, with good care, the girl would probably pull through, there was a long breath of relief, and when it was announced to the crowd there was a cheer for Daisy Daisy. The tide had now turned completely.

Deadwood Dick, with Zeb Marvin and Billy Millroy, took leave.

They had a work to do, and if they hoped to succeed in it they had to be up and doing.

First of all, a search was made for Pete White and the others who were known as Jarrat's intimates, but not one of them was to be found anywhere within the camp limits.

"What is goin' to be done?" asked Marvin.

"We must hound them down, that is all we can do," asserted Bristol.

"And et 'pears that they have gone different ways out of ther camp," Billy suggested.

"That was for the purpose of confusing us."

"Not a doubt of that," agreed Zeb.

"But," assumed Dick, "they have a

place of meeting understood, and before night they will all be together again, you can depend on it."

"You aire right, fer hard dollars," declared Marvin.

"The question is, where will that rendezvous be?"

"That is ther question, and who kin answer et?"

"I think I can," Dick said further. "It will be somewhere in or near the Devil's Gateway."

"Right, fer rocks!" cried Billy. "That is where ther treasure is s'posed ter be hid, and they will want to find et as soon as they kin, and slope with et."

"Unless they have longer heads than I give them credit for," insinuated Dick. "We must go there, and at the same time try to get on the track of Jackson Potts, for there is no doubt in my mind but that he holds the lost paper. This has been one of the hottest cases I have handled in some time."

"And et may be hotter 'fore we git done."

Half an hour later saw them set out from the camp.

They could have had fifty men for the asking, but the chances with a few were considered better, for the many would only increase the liability to discovery.

Zeb Marvin acted as guide, taking them by a trail that was comparatively little known, and in due season they came out upon a ledge high up on one of the sides of the hideous gulch.

To look into the depths below, which ended in blackness, the bottom being entirely beyond the range of vision, was enough to make dizzy any brain that was not well used to such heights.

Here they took a long survey of the scene.

"Have you ever been down there?" Dick asked of Zeb.

"No, I never have, and I don't know of any man that has," was the response.

"Then there is no way to get down?"

"A rope is ther only means, I should say."

"Then I do not envy our friends their hunt for a fortune, that is certain," Dick observed.

"Yer needn't," said Zeb, soberly. "Thar' is a Injun legend that no man goes down inter that hole and ever comes out again. That is what gives et its name, I take et."

"It certainly has a dismal look about it," Dick agreed. "I am not anxious to test the truth of the legend, unless I have to. By the way, is this the only approach to the place?"

"No, thar' is another on the other side; comes right up to that notch on ther black ridge on t'other side."

"Then they are as likely to come up that way as this?"

"More likely, I should say."

"Why?"

"It ain't everybody knows this hyar trail, while the other is purty well known."

"And yet both may be known to Jar-rat."

"Yas, that is so. This one is known to his gal, for I brought her up here one day to show her the hole, she askin' me ter do et."

"And she may have told her father. That being the case, they are likely to come this way. But we ought to divide our force, and at least one of us go to the other side. We ought to have one more man."

"It's too late in ther day," said Zeb. "We would have to go almost all ther way back to ther camp, and then et's miles and miles around thar'."

"The stronger reason, then, I think, why the fellows will come this way."

"You may be right."

"And we should have some place to conceal ourselves in, so as to see without being seen—"

"Such a place is right at hand," said Zeb, interrupting. "Ef ye have got ther narve to climb around this p'nt of rock thar's another flat place on the other side."

"We'll go around then. It is no use going back now, as you say, and as there will be a full moon to-night we can have a commanding view of the whole chasm. If nothing turns up to-night, we can make other plans and carry on the search in some other way to-morrow."

After debate, this was decided to be the only plan for the present, and it was adopted.

With care, they climbed around the point of rock Zeb had indicated, and found that the shelf on the other side was even more roomy than the one from which they had come.

Here they sat down, and the time was passed telling personal reminiscences, those told by Dick himself being listened to with keen avidity.

They were thus engaged when a voice fell upon their ears.

Becoming instantly silent, they listened. It was a woman's voice, evidently, and she was coming along the rocky way to the edge of the gorge.

The three men looked at one another questioningly, and it was noticed that the face of Billy Millroy was deathly white. The voice came nearer, and there was no mistaking that it was a woman's.

When only the rocky point separated the men from her, some of her words could be caught, and it was found that she was sobbing an earnest prayer.

Billy Millroy was trembling like an aspen.

"It is Ellen!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "She means to kill herself! The least noise we make will cause her to jump off into that hole!"

"It is the voice of the woman who gave me that paper," whispered Dick. "You see, my guess was true; she knows her father's secret, and cannot bear it. May God give us wisdom and means!"

Earnestly, pleadingly rose the voice, sobbing forth a prayer for the forgiveness of her father for his awful crime, and for herself for what she was about to do; and every word she uttered, in the hearing of these witnesses was proof that Job Jar-rat was the man who had murdered Andrew Stephenson.

It was a terrible moment for the three men who heard that prayer. If they made the least sound that could be heard it would be to hasten the frightful intention of the girl into the fulfillment of the act, and yet if they hesitated to do something she was certain to plunge to her death almost within reach of their arms. God give them wisdom indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FATAL VENTURE.

Billy Millroy stood trembling, almost ready to drop, utterly helpless.

Zeb Marvin had his jaws hard set, and his face, too, was deathly white. He looked to Dick for the needed solution.

Deadwood Dick had a grim, determined expression, and was putting his brain to the rack for a plan by which to save the girl from the self-destruction she intended.

He could not get over the rock without being seen, and then it would be too late. If he spoke a word, it would prompt her to make the terrible leap in the same instant. If he tried to climb around the rock and prevent the act, he would be too late save only to witness it.

If he only had a lariat—it would be one

chance in a million only, but still a chance. But, then, they had nothing of the kind.

"God give me an idea to save that life!" he cried, in a whisper.

Like a flash it came.

"Your hand," he whispered to Zeb, offering his left as he spoke. "Hold me hard; there is a good grip for your other hand in that niche. It is the only way, the only chance."

Zeb Marvin had no idea what Dick would do, but he was ready to perform his part. With a firm grip in the place Dick had indicated, he held on there with one hand, while Dick held to the other with a grip of steel, and with one foot braced on the very edge of the precipice, Dick swung himself out.

The prayer stopped instantly, ending in something like a startled cry, for, almost simultaneously came the report of a pistol, waking the echoes of the vast gorge in a thousand places. All was instantly silence on the other side of the point of rock, and Deadwood Dick swung back again to the firm footing behind him, a smoking revolver in his grasp.

Billy Millroy leaped to his feet with a despairing cry, and made a mad dash to throw himself over the ledge.

Dick's fist caught him a blow on the chest, sending him backward all in a heap.

"Kill me too!" Billy cried, baring his breast. "Me too!"

"I have killed no one," replied Dick. "I have saved her life for you; can't you understand?"

"Saved—her—"

"Yes; I have merely rendered her insensible by creasing her skull with a bullet—there was no other way! It was that or death for her."

Billy leaped up and mounted the dividing rock with a single bound, and was immediately on the other side, where his sobbing voice could be heard calling the name of the girl he loved.

Dick and Zeb followed, and they found him with the girl's head on his lap, and he was trying to bring her to.

Dick immediately examined the wound he had made, almost fearful that he had for once failed in a fine shot and done fatal work where it was not intended, for, in this case he had been forced to make sure of its doing all he intended.

A pressure of the finger on the bone satisfied him, however, and he drew a breath of relief.

"She is all right," he said. "It will be a time before she comes to, however."

"And may God forever bless you," cried Billy, catching Dick's hand and pressing it hard. "Only for you she would now be dead."

"Thank God, but leave me out of it," responded Dick, reverently. "But, now that we have got her, what are we going to do with her?" he asked, and he looked to Zeb for an answer.

"We had better take her to the cabin of Mountain Mose," was the answer.

"Where is that?"

"A couple o' miles or so from hyar. We kin take her thar' an' be back in not much more'n an hour."

"Take her, then, and I will await your return. Bring some water with you, and a chunk of bread, if you can get it. We will need it before morning."

Tenderly they took the girl up, and she was carried away with all the care possible under the circumstances, while Dick settled himself down to pass the time as best he might until their return.

By the time the two men got back again it was nearly night.

They reported having left the girl in the care of Mountain Mose and his old wife, and that she had come to.

The old couple had promised to take care of her, and they had been cautioned not to give her an opportunity to carry out the design she had in mind against her life.

Then began the lonely vigil.

After discussion, it was agreed that in all probability this night would be chosen for the finding of the treasure.

Night came, but ere it could grow completely dark the full moon mounted the hills in all her radiance, shedding her light in resplendent splendor over the rugged scene.

The vigil was destined to be of shorter duration than they had expected, for, ere the moon was an hour high, other lights drew the attention of the three watchers. Across the gorge, on the comb of the mountain on the other side, appeared torches.

"There they are," said Dick.

"Right you are," assented Zeb.

"Ready fer biz, too," decided Billy.

"Yes, evidently, and so are we," averred Dick.

The lights moved about on the crest of the mountain for some time, and then appeared to stand still.

The men had been at work with something, evidently, and it looked now as if they were about to put an experiment to the test. And presently, in the moonlight, something like a huge snake glided swiftly down from the point where they stood.

"A ladder!" averred Billy.

"Just what it is," acquiesced Dick. "And that accounts for the lights; they are going down."

For some time the ladder was paid out over the ledge into the gorge, but at last it seemed to come to an end. Hundreds of feet had been let down and it was plain that it had been prepared before that time.

The ladder out, one of the men ventured upon it, bearing a torch, and very slowly and carefully made his way downward. When he had gone down thirty feet or so another ventured to follow, and so on until four of them hung by the seemingly slender thread between time and eternity.

Dick and his companions watched, Dick standing upright, and the others kneeling on hands and knees, the moonlight playing full upon them, and thus they witnessed the perilous descent.

The men seemed to be carrying something, which was guessed to be further lengths of similar rope ladder.

Little by little they moved, slowly and steadily, until nothing but the four torches could be seen in the depths below. Then, of a sudden, the four lights darted downward simultaneously with the speed of lightning! The ladder had given way!

Up out of the darkness came a despairing cry; there was the hissing sound of the rope over the rocks, followed by the thunder of a mighty boulder to which the ladder had evidently been secured; then, in a few brief seconds, all was as silent as it had been before!

The three watchers turned away with a feeling of faintness, and made their way to the cabin of Mountain Mose. There they remained till morning, when they returned to Silver Valley, taking Ellen Jarratt with them.

Deadwood Dick's suspicion had been correct. Ellen's confession showed that her father had killed Stephenson for the purpose of getting possession of the paper. He had been taken into Stephenson's secret, and had been the maker of the ladder that had been prepared for the descent into the Devil's Gateway.

It turned out that Richard Bassatt and Andrew Stephenson had been one and the same person. Loving another woman,

Bassatt had deserted his wife for her rival, and had taken her name, Stephenson. Simon was this woman's son, but Bassatt was not his father. Simon was three years older than Daisy Bassatt. No search was made for the bodies, the descent into the gorge being considered next to impossible.

Billy Millroy and Ellen Jarratt were married. John Cook was best man and Simon Stephenson gave the bride away.

Deadwood Dick was on hand, and the happy couple thanked him for all their joy.

Daisy Daisy was not present, having not far enough recovered. When she did get around, almost her first caller was Mr. Shank, who asked her to become his wife—or something like that, but she declined the honor. A few days later Mr. Shank was making love to a buxom widow who had recently come to town.

Daisy Daisy and Simon were presently made one, and the family fortune was equally divided. On that occasion it was Deadwood Dick who gave the bride away, and he ventured the hope that she would prove for life to her husband what she had proven to him for a day—his right bower!

THE END.

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